FRANK ZAPPA INTERVIEWS

Questa raccolta di interviste, quasi tutte scaricate da afka.net, a seguito di una ricognizione per forza di cose incompleta, data la vastità del corpus, è stata collezionata nell'arco di alcuni anni. Comprende oltre 400.000 parole.

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Au secours! Voila les Mamans!!!

By Philippe Rault

Rock & Folk, November & December, 1967

A New York, j'ai rencontre Frank Vincent Zappa, leader du groupe le plus controversé des États-Unis, les Mothers of Invention. Leurs deux premiers albums 33 t, «Freak Out» et «Absolutely Free», sont des best-sellers en dépit d'un barrage systématique sur la quasi-totalité des antennes américaines. Partout où ils passent en public c'est le scandale, parce qu'ils attaquent pêle-mêle gouvernement américain, la société américaine en général, la vie sexuelle de la citoyenne américaine en particulier, les hippies et les disciples du LSD, la mauvaise «pop music» et le Creamcheese, cette pâte incolore, inodore et sans saveur qui, Outre-Atlantique, est supposée remplacer le fromage. . . la seule chose qu'ils respectent: la musique; pas une musique harmonieuse et délicate, mais plutôt un mélange de Free Jazz, de Musique électronique, de Musique contemporaine. De quoi épouvanter les oreilles non averties. . .

Cependant je tiens à souligner que les huit Mothers of Invention sont les musiciens qui m'ont le plus impressionné pendant mon séjour de deux mois et demi aux USA. Voici les confidences de leur leader, Frank, une des personnalités les plus extraordinaires que j'ai jamais rencontrées dans tout le show-business.

Frank, vous terminez en ce moment un spectacle qui dure depuis environ cinq mois ici Greenwich Village, au Garrick Theatre. Vous et les Mothers originaires de la Californie et vous avez toujours vécu là-bas. Quelle impression cela fait-il à un indigène de la West Coast de vivre cinq mois consécutifs New York?

Au début, j'ai beaucoup apprécié la différence de pression policière qui existe sur un individu entre New York et Los Angeles. La police est relativement meilleure New York mais la ville est si sale que je crois que c'est certainement l'un des endroits les plus sales au monde.

Il faut dire que la police Los Angeles est assez épouvantable!

Oui, exactement comme sous le régime nazi en Allemagne. . ..

Il me semble qu'à San Francisco, par contre, la situation est plus libérale, les rapports jeunesse-force de l'ordre sont un peu plus décontractés?

Oh! la situation est à peu près identique entre New York et San Francisco. Appelez cela plus libéral si vous voulez! En réalité l'état de choses en ce qui concerne l'activité de police aux États-Unis est plut effrayant l'heure actuelle. Je pense que les étrangers qui de

nos jours visitent les grandes villes américaines sont souvent stupéfaits par ce qu'ils voient et par les actes de violence dont ils sont les témoins.

Selon vous, quoi se limite l'activité normale d'un agent de l'ordre public?

Un agent de police est ici aux Etats-Unis l'employé d'un des divers États. Il a un supérieur qui lui donne des instructions et ce supérieur a des opinions et des attitudes qui bien souvent sont très éloignées de l'esprit de la loi. La lettre et l'esprit de la loi sont deux choses bien différentes. Les chefs de la police américaine ont une interprétation assez spéciale de ce qu'est la loi et de ce qu'elle devrait dans certaines communautés. Dans la rue, l'agent de police a tendance à porter des jugements de valeur sur les jeunes aux cheveux longs, sur les membres de minorités raciales et son attitude en est complètement déformée. . .

L'esprit de la loi et son application pratique, je crois que partout dans le monde il y a une différence énorme entre les deux. . .

Je ne connais pas encore beaucoup d'autres pays dans le monde, mais j'espère que la situation est meilleure. Il y a quelques semaines, j'ai passé trois jours Londres et Copenhague et là-bas tout a l'air si paisible, tranquille, propre et agréable en comparaison de la vie New York. . .

Vous allez bientôt faire une tournée en Europe, qu'attendez-vous de ce voyage?

Eh bien! tout d'abord je veux me rendre compte exactement s'il y a une véritable barrière linguistique et dans quelle mesure les gens pourront comprendre ce que nous taisons. J'espère que ce ne sera pas trop décevant; je ne pense pas que notre public européen comprendra immédiatement ce que nous jouons; nous essaierons d'expliquer le plus possible afin que l'auditoire ne soit pas laissé trop dans l'obscurité. Vous n'avez pas en Europe les mêmes situations sociales qu'aux Etats-Unis et la majorité de nos chansons sont écrites propos de situations sociales qui n'existent qu'aux Etats-Unis. En conséquence nous allons passer beaucoup de temps à formuler des explications. . ..

On est toujours étonné lorsque l'on apprend que les Mothers of Invention ne font pas de la musique psychédélique En fait, vous n'aimez pas du tout cette appellation. Pourquoi?

La manière dont on utilise la musique psychédélique aux États-Unis est purement frauduleuse. Je vais d'ailleurs vous dire une chose j'ai l'intention de me servir de cette fraude Le terme «psychedelic» est une marchandise d'emballage. C'est l'équivalent d'un nom de marque sur un papier de savon. L'appellation «psychedelic» représente toute musique qu'une maison de disque américaine essaie de rendre commerciale et vendable un marché de très jeunes adolescents attirés par une forme bizarre de rock'n'roll. Toute musique un peu étrange et qu'on ne peut pas bien classifier sous l'étiquette rock ou R'n'B ou folk-rock sera placée sous l'indication psychedelic. C'est tout simplement de la fraude. . . Maintenant, Londres, j'ai été très étonné de découvrir des groupes qui jouent vraiment de la musique psychédélique. J'ai vu là-bas le Pink Floyd et j'ai écouté des disques par un groupe dénommé «Tomorrow» et je pense qu'ils sont vraiment excellents. . .. Il y a une chose bizarre qui se produit lorsque les Anglais s'intéressent la musique américaine. . . comme l'époque où les Rolling Stones ont commencé à jouer du rhythm and blues. . .. ils avaient écouté de vieux disques de rhythm and blues américains et avaient essayé de copier ce style; sans le vouloir ils ont ainsi débouché sur une manière de jouer qui est devenue vraiment «les Rolling Stones». Nous retrouvons la même chose avec la musique

psychédélique; les groupes anglais ont cru qu'aux États-Unis il existait une musique psychédélique; ils y ont cru, ont essayé d'imiter ce qu'ils avaient entendu sur les disques, et en fin de compte ce sont eux, et non les Américains, qui ont trouvé le véritable idiome psychedelic. . . J'en suis d'ailleurs très content parce que ces deux groupes – le Pink Floyd et Tomorrow – sont tout fait exceptionnels.

J'ai moi-même entendu le Grateful Dead et Big Brother et je dois avouer que leurs chansons n'ont rien de très avant-gardiste. C'est simplement du rock, souvent d'ailleurs influencé par le country and western. . ..

Ça n'est même pas du rock, c'est une forme très faiblarde de rhythm and blues; voilà des musiciens qui essaient de prouver au monde qu'ils ont beaucoup de «soul», ils essaient très fort de chanter comme des Noirs mais ça ne marche pas!

Les Mothers of Invention, dans quelle catégorie de groupe pourrait-on les classer? Est-ce du rock, de la musique électronique, de la satire sociale, du free jazz? Comment vous, Frank Zappa, définissez-vous votre groupe?

Je pense que nous faisons «de la musique contemporaine», c'est-à-dire une forme artistique qui est liée notre environnement social actuel. Ce que nous jouons peut difficilement être classifié comme du rock'n'roll; si on doit nous définir, avant tout je pense que nous sommes non-rock. Notre matériel musical est en grande partie dada le reste comprend toutes les choses bizarres et inexplicables qui se déroulent sur la scène pendant le spectacle. Il y a un certain nombre d'événements que nous ne pourrons jamais enregistrer parce que, pour les comprendre, il faut en les témoins visuels directs. Nous effectuons en scène des gestes et des mouvements physiques qui parfois tiennent de la chorégraphie, parfois arrivent volontairement, parfois sont de purs accidents et parfois impliquent une participation de l'auditoire. Des choses tr étranges se sont passées sur la scène du Garrick Theatre ici New York; ainsi l'autre soir une fille est montée sur la scène elle devait mesurer environ 1,50 m et elle avait les cheveux totalement hirsutes. Mes cheveux sont déjà assez libres, mais les cheveux de cette jeune personne étaient vraiment incroyables.

Une petite fille d'à peu près dix-huit ans, avec des lunettes noires, des sandales, portant deux sacs provisions et une flûte… Donc elle grimpe sur la scène, dépose ses sacs provisions, se colle la flûte dans la bouche et de toute évidence subit une attaque épileptique devant les spectateurs absolument stupéfaits. Naturellement, nous ne l'avons pas arrêtée c'était assez extraordinaire. . . Elle est restée là environ une demi-heure quand elle a eu fini nous nous sommes dit bonsoir, elle est repartie et personne dans le public ne savait plus quoi faire. . .

Est-ce que votre musique est proche du happening? Vous-même avez-vous déjà pris part des happenings?

Oui, notre musique est en permanence un happening. Chaque show est différent. Les chansons demeurent relativement les mêmes, mais leur ordre est sans cesse bouleversé, elles s'imbriquent les unes dans les autres ou se suivent sans temps mort. Il nous arrive de jouer trois quarts d'heure consécutifs sans nous arrêter. Souvent le public reste hypnotisé et la fin des morceaux il en oublie d'applaudir. . . Personnellement je n'ai pris part qu'à un seul happening; c'était Ucla en Californie. J'avais amené quelques-uns de mes enregistrements privés. . .

Parlant d'enregistrements, vous venez de terminer un 33 t de musique d'avant-garde dont vous êtes le compositeur et le chef d'orchestre, pour Capitol. . .

Non, au départ ce devait pour Capitol et puis MGM (qui sort les disques des Mothers aux États-Unis) a eu peur que Capitol gagne trop d'argent et leur a racheté l'album complet.

Cet album s'appelle «Lumpy Gravy»?

C'est un ballet musical; il n'y a aucune chanson.

Vous en avez écrit la musique. Depuis combien de temps écrivez-vous?

Depuis l' de quatorze ou seize ans.

Votre principale influence a été la musique électronique et la musique contemporaine. Qui spécialement?

Varèse, Boulez, John Cage, Stockhausen, Stravinsky, Bartok, Schoenberg. Je pense que dans le domaine de l'orchestration Varèse est le maitre. Sa manière de combiner les instruments était très scientifique. Certains instruments associés ensemble produisent des surtonalités qui ont une vie bien elles si elles sont traitées correctement dans un environnement sonore. Varèse dans ses partitions, donnait des instructions aux musiciens pour que ceux-ci poussent leurs cuivres jusque dans leurs retraites les plus profondes afin d'obtenir ainsi des structures totalement inharmoniques.

Qui d'autre admirez-vous aussi parmi les compositeurs vivants?

Stravinsky et Boulez. Stockhausen également.

Vous avez entendu parler des travaux du «Groupe de Recherche de l'ORTF» Paris?

J'ai peu suivi leurs travaux jusqu' maintenant mais dès que j'aurai le temps, je veux écouter les dernières œuvres de Xenakis qui, m'a-t-on dit, sont assez extraordinaires. Pourquoi les jeunes n'achètent-ils pas des disques de Iannis Xenakis?

C'est peut-être parce que pour l'instant on ne leur propose que les Monkees?

Écoutez, si on mettait autant d'argent dans la promotion de Xenakis qu'on le fait pour les Monkees, les teenagers achèteraient les disques de Xenakis.

Ils les achèteraient peut-être mais y comprendraient-ils grand-chose?

Vous croyez qu'ils comprennent l'affaire Monkees? Qu'ils comprennent les Monkees – et je n'entends pas seulement leur musique! Qu'ils comprennent que des businessmen gourmands quelque part dans un bureau s'assoient et imaginent diverses manières d'enfoncer dans la gorge du teenager moyen un produit manufacturé, qu'il le veuille ou non, de retourner sa manière de penser par des méthodes secrètes dont nous ignorons même la nature?

Dans le cas des Monkees, il faut dire que les jeunes Américains sont assez poussés par leurs parents. . .

Eh! bien, est-ce que la bénédiction des parents excuse quoi que ce soit?

Et du point de vue philosophique? Vous vous rattachez au mouvement provo je crois?

Oui; malheureusement, il n'existe pratiquement pas de mouvement provo aux États-Unis. Et d'après ce que je comprends, c'est en train de mourir Amsterdam aussi maintenant. . .

Qu'est-ce qu'un «Love-in» ou un «Be-in» pour vous?

Un «Love-in» est un événement très dramatique, suivant lequel une bande de teenagers, parfois d'adultes, souvent d'attardés mentaux se réunissent dans un endroit public et prétendent s'aimer les uns les autres; afin de prouver au monde que l'Amour existe encore; en fait pour se prouver eux-mêmes que l'Amour existe toujours. Mais aucun d'entre eux n'y croit vraiment et je pense qu'il vaut mieux qu'ils n'y croient pas parce que s'ils y croyaient, alors leur cas deviendrait grave. L'Amour n'existe plus.

Voilà une opinion bien pessimiste

Entendons-nous, je ne parle que d'un point de vue strictement américain. Je ne sais pas où en est le problème en Europe mais aux États-Unis, de nos jours, il y a tellement de gens qui partout affirment et crient «I love», «I love» que l'on se pose vraiment des questions propos de leur sincérité. . .

C'est comme en hiver lorsqu'il fait -10°, et que l'on crie «j'ai chaud, j'ai chaud»!

C'est comme siffler dans l'obscurité pour ne pas avoir peur.

Que pensez-vous du nombre impressionnant de jeunes drogués dans votre pays. Utilisez-vous une drogue quelconque vous-même?

Non, je n'utilise aucune drogue personnellement. D'ailleurs j'en ai assez de répondre dans les interviews que je dénonce l'usage de la drogue. Je ne pense pas que l'usage de la drogue soit mauvais. Du moins n'est pas pire que de voir son père et sa mère se saouler à mort! Si les gosses veulent s'envoyer en l'air et pénétrer dans un domaine de la conscience où ils sont «stupéfiés», s'ils réussissent éliminer pour 10 ou 15 minutes leur environnement habituel et quelques instants une atmosphère de vie tolérable, je ne vois rien de mal cela. Je pense que c'est parfait.

Est-ce que vous pensez que la drogue stimule vraiment la créativité artistique?

J'ai utilisé diverses drogues moi-même durant mon adolescence et j'ai composé certaines choses sous l'influence de substances chimiques. Plus tard, je me suis penché sur ces «œuvres» et je me suis rendu compte qu'elles n'avaient aucune valeur. J'ai eu honte de ce que j'avais fait!

J'ai constaté un manque certain de maturité dans la jeunesse américaine. Cela doit expliquer beaucoup de choses. . .

Certainement. Mais c'est là une conséquence normale de notre système d'éducation qui cherche maintenir le niveau intellectuel du public si bas que celui-ci gobe tous les slogans publicitaires des industries de consommation courante. Avoir aux Etats-Unis une civilisation intelligente et cultivée serait très dangereux. Imaginez un peu, si tout le monde

se mettait réfléchir sur les slogans des agences de publicité, on ne vendrait plus aucun produit, les usines fermeraient leurs portes, le niveau de vie tomberait. Il faut vraiment idiot pour acheter ces produits et le travail de nos écoles et de nos universités est de maintenir les gens dans leur ignorance afin qu'ils demeurent des consommateurs de premier ordre. La machine est parfaitement rôdée comme vous pouvez le voir!

Quelle est votre position politique en ce moment?

Je suis « intéressé» . . . c'est a horrible à observer, mais néanmoins je suis «intéressé».

Revenons au domaine de la musique. Pour vous, c'est la seule chose vraiment digne d'intérêt dans l'existence. . .

C'est peut-être la seule chose pour laquelle j'ai encore de la considération, la seule chose que je respecte. . .

En dehors de la musique contemporaine et de la musique électronique? Aimez-vous le jazz et le rhythm and blues?

Oui, j'aime beaucoup le R'n'B, Willi Mae Thornton, Howling Wolf, Muddy Waters, Johnny «Guitar» Watson, Slim Harpo. . .

Ce sont là des artistes déjà assez anciens?

C'est le blues que j'entendais quand j'étais gosse. Cette musique était populaire aux États-Unis entre 1955 et 1958. Je sais qu'en France et en Europe, on ne sort maintenant que certains de ces vieux disques. . .

(à suivre)

On a beaucoup parlé, sans savoir très bien ce que c'était, de «Uncle Meat». Pouvez-vous nous fournir des explications à ce sujet?

«Uncle Meat» est une jeune personne dont la véritable identité est Sandy Herbits [Hurwitz]. Maintenant, si vous sortez aux États-Unis un disque sous un nom pareil, c'est le bide certain.Mais s'il s'agit d'un être au physique agréable et que vous l'appeliez «Uncle Meat», alors le disque marchera. Il se peut que vous autres, en Europe et à Paris, vous ayez quelques difficultés à comprendre ce raisonnement, mais chez nous il en va ainsi. Sandy a beaucoup de talent, elle compose d'excellentes chansons et les interprètes encore mieux. Au moment de Pâques, cette année, elle participait à notre show au Garrick, après quoi, elle est partie se défouler du côté de San Francisco. . . elle s'est mis des plumes et des fleurs dans les cheveux, des clochettes autour du cou et a participé à la tournée du Grateful Dead. . . les vacances du teenager américain moyen en somme. . .

Et puis elle est revenue vers les Mothers?

Oui, elle a vite compris : elle est rentrée précipitamment à New York, où nous allons l'enregistrer dans un proche avenir.

Au fait, comment l'avez-vous découverte?

Le plus simplement du monde. Elle est arrivée un jour au Garrick, s'est installée, a fait connaissance avec les membres du groupe et ne nous a plus quittés. Ça n'est que bien plus tard que nous avons découvert, à notre plus grande stupéfaction, qu'elle savait chanter formidablement bien. Nous avons alors décidé de l'enregistrer et d'exploiter ses talents auprès du jeune public. . .

N'y a-t-il pas là une contradiction avec votre attitude sociale? Vous travaillez comme des capitalistes alors que chacune de vos oeuvres attaque le système capitaliste?

Il n'y a pas de contradiction. Nous utilisons les mêmes procédés qui servent à vendre des machines à laver, des onguents pour les hémorroïdes ou de la crème fraîche. Grâce à ces procédés, j'ai pu attirer l'attention du public sur mon groupe et sur d'autres artistes comme «Uncle Meat».

Vous êtes prêts à utiliser, donc, les armes mêmes des gens que vous attaquez? Vous rejetez complètement les méthodes de réaction passive des hippies?

Tout d'abord, les hippies sont incapables de détruire le système. Ils n'en ont pas le temps, ils sont trop occupés à se «défoncer», à rechercher leurs paradis artificiels. Deuxième raison : ils ne savent pas comment agir; ce sont encore des gosses. . .

La seule manière pour agir efficacement contre un système de vie aussi épouvantable que celui des États-Unis, c'est d'utiliser les propres armes de ce système contre lui-même. Les gens qui se trouvent à la tête du pays actuellement sont si gourmands qu'ils préféreraient gagner un dollar plutôt que d'essayer de se rendre compte de ce qui se passe vraiment. Ils ne pensent pas dans l'avenir, ils manquent totalement d'imagination, et le jour où vous laissez mourir votre imagination, alors vraiment vous vous trouvez dans une situation difficile. . . parce que la personne qui peut prévoir les choses que vous êtes incapable de prévoir possède automatiquement un avantage sur vous. . .

Que pensez-vous des philosophes beat, tel Ginsberg?

Je ne me sens aucune affinité envers des personnages du genre Ginsberg ou Timothy Leary. . . ou Billy Graham. . .

. . . Le patron du Fillmore Auditorium?

Non, pas celui-là. Le Billy Graham du Fillmore est un rude businessman et en conséquence, il ne mérite que mon admiration. . .

Ne prédicateur alors?

Oui, ce Billy Graham-là. Je crois que lui, Timothy Leary et Allen ginsberg, en fin de compte ce sont un seul et même personnage, mais habillé de trois manières différentes.

Pour revenir au sujet de la musique, vous nous avez déjà dit que vous aimiez la musique contemporaine; que pensez-vous par ailleurs de l'engouement actuel pour les sonorités orientales?

J'aime beaucoup les musiques orientales. Mais je suis intimement persuadé que, par exemple, la musique indienne doit avant tout être écoutée aux Indes, et non dans une atmosphère de rock comme aux Etats-Unis-Unis. Je veux dire par la que, transposée dans

un environnement pop, cette musique perd sans nul doute sa signification profonde. Ça, n'est plus qu'un gimmick… Ravi Shankar au Festival de Monterey, encore des leçons de sitar à l'Indian Music School de Los Angeles, pour moi ça n'a vraiment rien d'excitant. . . L'une des raisons pour les quelles les hippies aiment la musique orientale, c'est parce que . . . c'est différent. Peut-être que je n'y comprends absolument rien, mais il y a une chose dont je suis sûr, c'est que mon père et ma mère détestent ça. Si j'aime cette musique, ils seront bien embêtés. . . Les hyppies recherchent avant tout les déguisements bizarres et les causes impopulaires. . . juste pour être différents. . . c'est la tactique de l'autruche, la tête dans le sol pour éviter les véritables problèmes!

Etre différents plutôt que de se conformer aux règles d'habitude en usage dans la société, ne pensez-vous pas que c'est l'attitude saine de gens qui cherchent quelque chose d'autre, qui veulent se dégager de la routine et du lavage de cerveau quotidien?

En fin de compte, leur position sociale n'est qu'un conformisme inversé. Conformisme qui se manifeste d'une autre manière, mais conformisme quand même. Ils ont formé une société parallèle; les mêmes événements se produisent, à la différence qu'ils sont vêtus d'une étrange façon. La majorité des hyppies sont aussi prêts à suivre les théories de Ginsberg, Leary et autres idoles de cette espèce, que les citoyens normaux sont prêts à suivre les paroles de Lyndon Johnson ou des autres marchands de canons des États-Unis.

Pris entre les straight people, les citoyens américains normaux, et les hippies, est-ce que les Mothers of Invention réussissent à faire parvenir leur message jusqu'au public?

Non, pas complètement. Il y a d'abord un problème matériel, celui de la langue. Aux États-Unis, on parle très différemment de New York à La Nouvelle-Orléans, il y a de nombreuses choses que nous disons et qui sont incompréhensibles pour un tas de gens. Le second problème, c'est que les choses qui nous intéressent passent bien au-dessus de la tête de l'Américain moyen et de la jeunesse américaine d'aujourd'hui. L a majorité des jeunes aux États-Unis se désintéresse complètement de la politique; pour que notre message, si message il y a, parvienne jusqu'à eux, il faudrait qu'ils aient le minimum d'attention indispensable pour agir et essayer de changer les choses.

Croyez-vous qu'en Europe, les jeunes soient plus conscients du phénomène politique?

J'en suis convaincu et la meilleure preuve en est le mouvement provo à Amsterdam. La jeunesse devrait aux États-Unis prendre en main elle-même ses intérêts. Les moins de 25 ans représentent 55 % de la population américaine; or ce sont des gens entre 50 et 70 ans qui gouvernent le pays, des gens complexés par une éducation trop rigoureuse et puritaine. La jeunesse actuelle est beaucoup plus libre, dans le domaine sexuel entre autres, mais aussi parce que les valeurs sont différentes. L'élément gouvernant de la nation est en permanente réaction contre elle . . . pourquoi ne se retire-t-il pas, ne laisse-t-il pas la place à ses successeurs? Si la nouvelle génération prenait les commandes, les aines n'auraient pas a en souffrir papa et maman n'auraient pas à en souffrir! Ils pourraient prendre alors une confortable retraite sur leurs terres. . . quelque part au Texas!

Quelle est votre opinion sur la question raciale dans votre pays?

Il fallait s'en occuper il y a un siècle. Tout d'abord, ce problème n'aurait jamais dû exister, mais enfin, il existe et je ne pense pas que les révoltes améliorent la situation. La seule chose qu'elles aient pu amener c'est la prise de conscience par les Blancs du fait que la

masse des gens de couleur n'était pas heureuse de son sort. . . En tout cas il ne faut pas trop espérer brûler deux cents pâtés de maisons la veille et trouver l'égalité raciale le lendemain matin!

Vous avez des amis parmi les Noirs?

Je n'ai pas d'amis. . . ou presque pas! Le producteur de nos enregistrements est un Noir, Tom Wilson. C'est un type formidable, nous nous entendons bien. . . Tom Wilson est le producteur d'avant-garde aux Etats-Unis depuis douze ou quatorze ans. Il a été le premier à enregistrer Cecil Taylor; c est lui qui a produit la plupart des disques de Dylan. Il y a deux ans, il a convaincu Dylan d'électrifier sa guitare et d'adopter une forme de musique Top 40 afin de toucher un public beaucoup plus vaste. Si Dylan n'avait pas réussi à faire passer sur les ondes ses chansons engagées, il est certain que le protest n'aurait jamais existé sur une échelle nationale et internationale. Tom a également enregistré le Velvet Underground. Beaucoup de gens n'aiment pas ce groupe et, moi-même, je réserve mon opinion sur ce qu'ils font en scène .. mais j'aime leur album, c'est exactement la folk music du New York de la perversion.

Frank, vous êtes l'un des musiciens les plus actifs que j'aie rencontrés aux États-Unis. Vous travaillez vingt-quatre heures sur vingt- quatre?

Dix-huit heures sur vingt-quatre seulement!

Acomposer surtout?

Non, d'ailleurs, c'est un problème qui me tracasse en ce moment, depuis trois mois je n'ai pas trouvé le temps de travailler sérieusement sur de nouvelles oeuvres. J'ai composé beaucoup de chansons, mais au départ ce sont les compositions pour orchestre qui m'intéressent. Écrire une chanson, c'est le b, a, ba, il suffit de plaquer quelques accords et de chercher un peu les paroles, écrire pour un orchestre c'est une autre paire de manches. Les conditions dans lesquelles j'ai écrit «Lumpy Gravy» étaient assez délirantes, j'avais onze jours pour composer et enregistrer ce ballet, au même moment ma femme et moi avons été expulsés de notre domicile à Hollywood, nous avons dû déménager, chercher une nouvelle habitation et, pratiquement, j'ai composé «Lumpy Gravy» entre deux motels, dans des conditions assez bizarres. . .

Vos propriétaires vous ont mis à la porte! Qu'est-ce qu'on pense des Mothers à Los Angeles? Au fond, qu'est-ce qu'on pense des Mothers aux Etats-Unis?

Je ne pense pas que les Américains soient très enthousiastes à l'égard des Mothers. Il y a quelques personnes qui nous trouvent formidables, mais la majorité est encore convaincue de la supériorité des Monkees. . . et après tout, peut-être ont-ils raison!

Peut-etre ont-ils raison?

Oui, en tout cas les Monkees sont propres et ils ne présentent rigoureusement aucun danger. Qu'on se le dise!

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http://www.science.uva.nl/~robbert/zappa/interviews/Kofsky.html

Frank Zappa Interview by Frank Kofsky

from "The Age of Rock", Sounds of the American Cultural Revolution, edited by Jonathan Eisen, A Vintage Book, a division of RANDOM HOUSE, New York © 1969

When I read into what you're trying to do in your music is not just play music, but also agitate and educate –
And synthesize ...

It strikes me as a kind of musical version of Berthold Brecht. Might that be a correct inference?
Well, I'm not a Brecht fan because I don't know that much about what he does, but people keep saying that, so maybe it's true. I've read hardly any of his stuff. I've heard the "Threepenny Opera" – like half of it one time – couldn't sit through the rest.

I don't necessarily mean that you were copying him. It just seems to me that his idea was that you could use art to galvanize people into some kind of action.
Oh, I think we can definitely galvanize people into some kind of action. We galvanized somebody into singing "Louie, Louie" tonight, who was asleep. [In the Mothers' first show at the Garrick Theatre that evening, a young man who was apparently tripping out at the time had volunteered to come up from the audience and sing "Louie, Louie" accompanied by the Mothers.] From zero to "Louie, Louie" in ten seconds is not bad. We can generate that sort of wave, and I hope that once we get on a footing where we can reach more people at once, more mass-media exposure, then we'll be able to get more of that happening. Some of the stuff we get for fan mail, although it's not huge in quantity, what those letters are saying, no other group in the world is getting. We get fantastic letters from anarchists, nineteen years old: "Help me in my town," and all that stuff.

Are those the people you want to appeal to, or is that what you want people to do then – destroy the system?
No, not exactly destroy it. I want it modified to the point where it works properly. A lot of people think that a new political movement, the ideal new political movement, is to bust it all up and start all over again with tribes and feathers in your hair and everybody loves everybody else. That's a lie. Those kids don't love each other; they're in that because it's like another club – it's like the modern-day equivalent of a street gang. It's clean pachucos, a little hairier perhaps. But it's not right. First of all, the idea of busting it all down and starting all over again is stupid. The best way to do it, and what I would like to see happen, what I'm working towards, is using the system against itself to purge itself, so that it can really work. I think politics is a valid concept, but what we have today is not really politics. It's the equivalent of the high school election. It's a popularity contest. It's got nothing to do with politics – what it is is mass merchandising.

Then your kind of politics is something that raises real alternatives: say, a thorough revamping of American foreign policy – doing away with the American Empire; really discussing the issues that exist and not simply running two television

candidates.
Right.

How do you envision the connection between what you're doing now and generating that kind of a movement?
First of all, I would like to manufacture a thing called the Interested Party – I'm taking steps in that direction now – which would be a third party that lives up to its name.

Then it would be a second party, really.
Actually, yes. The people that would be active in such a venture would have to be the ones ... in every small town there's a little guy that lives there that knows what's happening and everybody thinks he's a creep, and he's the only one who's right, you know? We have a way of reaching these people, because they come to us, they find us, because they say, "Maybe there's a chance." So suppose we don't sell ten million albums. We've reached most of those kids in those towns. A lot of them have written to us, and the other ones have heard and at least been made aware that somebody is thinking in the direction that they're thinking. I think what we do is really constructive, although a lot of people are repelled superficially by the sound of it, the way we look, and some of the grotesque action on stage. But those are all therapeutic shockwaves.

Sometimes when you insult the audience, as in "You're Probably Wondering Why I'm Here," and in the notes to the first album - this is all part of the thing of stinging them into action, isn't it? You're trying to arouse them and make them angry instead of apathetic.
Yes, yes, I think that it's easier to make somebody mad than to make somebody love. And seeing as how hate is the absolute negative of love, if you can evoke hate and it's really there, you can polarize it, and then you really could have love.

Don't you think that this emphasis on love that we see among hippies really reflects not so much their ability to love at the moment, but their desire to create the kind of society where it will be possible to love?
No, I think that what they do is a definite indication of their inability to love, because the whole hippie scene is wishful thinking. They wish they could love but they're full of shit, and they're kidding themselves into saying, "I love! I love! I love!" And the more times they say it, the more times they think they love. But like it doesn't work, and most of them don't have the guts to admit to themselves that it's a lie.

Do you think that this is because it's an early phase of the thing?
Oh yeah, I see it growing into something that really works. I'm glad the kids are pretending they're dropping out, because when they find out that that doesn't work they'll be ready for some sort of action.

Revolutionary action?
Sure. I think a revolution – not the sloppy kind, but the kind that really works – you know, it's about time for that.

Do you want to distinguish between sloppy kind and – ?
The sloppy kind is blood-in-the-street and all that bullshit. Today, a revolution can be accomplished by means of mass media, with technical advances that Madison Avenue is using to sell you washing machines and a loaf of bread and everything else. This can be used to change the whole country around – painlessly.

How so?
Because all those facilities are available, and facilities that the people are using now on Madison Avenue – there are techniques above and beyond that which they aren't aware of and which I think I've come into – things that they're not ready to believe exist yet. Because they have a tendency to get into a formula, like they get into their bag with their motivational researchers with their degrees, who have only scratched the surface of what the youth movement is about. They don't know youth from shit. And that's the market. You know they're still selling products to the youth on a glandular level. There are ways to move the youth to action through their brains and not through their glands. You have to start off part of the thing on the glandular level just to get their interest.

As you do now.
But we're not nearly as glandular as most of the rock and roll bands, because we're not selling sex that much.

Well, you insult people too much to be really glandular. You challenge them.
But we've got enough so they don't lose interest in us completely. If we tried to just be straight up there and sing our songs and go away, we wouldn't make it, because we're old men compared to rock-and-roll standards, and there's no sex appeal to an old man singing a straight song. So if we do something that makes us bizarre, we got that happening for us.

The thing that occurs to me at this point is, we know the powers that be in this country are pretty much opposed to people revolutionizing their society-witness the way Johnson deals with Vietnam when the Vietnamese try to do that. Do you think that those same powers would be any more lenient with you if it looked like you were trying to take everything they had away from them?
First of all, it will never look to them like I'm going to take everything away from them, because I'm not taking it all away from them – I have no intention of taking it all away from them.

Well, taking their power. I didn't necessarily mean taking their personal possessions. But their power right now is the ability to command what the man on the street thinks through their control of the mass media and so on and so forth.
That's where I have one basic human drive on my side that they can't defeat – greed. You see, they're so greedy, and the powers that be are not necessarily the government, but you're talking about big industry and the military and all, and that's greed – motivated activity. Industry wants to make money and I'm getting into a phase now where I'm being used by industry to move products. A lot of the industries now are aware of the fact that they're in a vicious cycle: in order to sell their goods to the youth market, which accounts for the major market of most of American products, that same market that buys most of the records, you have a weird situation where in effect record companies especially are helping to disseminate the information which will cause the kids to wake up and move and eventually destroy what they stand for, and they can't help it.

Ralph Gleason tells me that this is happening by kids in the Haight-Ashbury in particular, by simply turning their back on big-corporation society and going out and creating a parallel society of their own.
That doesn't work. They can't survive. That's like saying, "We're going to secede from the union; we'll have our town secede from the union." That's stupid.

In a sense, I agree with you, but it also seems to me that there's a certain element of wishful thinking in what you propose, too. In my rigid Marxist bag, it does seem to me that the power Elite (or ruling class), when you get to that point where it looks as though you are somehow going to emancipate the population from taking orders from them, they simply aren't going to let you have it that easily. They are going to try to do the same thing they tried to do to Fidel Castro or to Ho Chi Minh ...
That's all a question of how you perceive what I'm trying to do. I'm not trying to take power.

No, I'm not saying you're trying to take power, but you are trying to –
You originally brought up the question of power. Now, power is a thing that bears on this case, but what we're really talking about is modifying the system just so it works. The present principles of democracy that were originally set up when they invented it aren't being applied today, and I think that with an educated population, democracy works. So what we need are things that would change the shape of education.

I didn't mean that you personally wanted to take power, but I do think that you meant that you wanted to undermine the power of those people who have it now – the power to control people's minds.
It's like this. A person likes to feel useful in the society; people have certain things that they can do. I happen to have a knack for doing that sort of thing, and if I can apply it to good use, it gives me satisfaction just to know that I'm functioning. Where normally, you know, I wouldn't have a chance to use my trade, because what I can do is spread out over a broad range of activities. I like to do them all because it feels good to do that. If I can help at the same time, that's groovy. If it works, fine. If it doesn't work, at least I kept myself occupied for a while.

So in other words, this isn't some rigid prescription that you're trying to force on people?
No! If I thought it was like that, I'd be wearing armbands or be out there with a costume on – the robe – and doing it with some showmanship. But we've taken our time about presenting our case and the scene itself has been developing at a rate – it seems like its developing slower than I wanted it to. But, I am not in a position of where I can govern the growth rate

No, isn't it a question of feedback from your audience to you, I would imagine?
Yes and no. We keep track of what's going on out there, but what they do and what they say doesn't have a hell of a lot of bearing on what we're going to do for them. Except that I try to forecast certain social-polititals events. We have some material that's going into the next album about the concentration camps in California – you're seeing this before the world even knows what the tune is because I turned these out the other day. These are going on the album, The Mothers and Lenny Bruce, which is due for September release.

Well, how does that go? Is it going to be real Lenny Bruce on there?
Yeah. I'm editing the tapes of Lenny's and interspersing these special tunes, so we come up with an oratorio thing, and the name of the album is Our Man in Nirvana.

I suspected that you and I had a lot in common, and one of the things we had in common was being turned on by Lenny Bruce.
Yeah.

Besides growing up in Los Angeles, putting twin pipes on our car and reprimering the right front fender and going to drive-ins. I wonder if anybody understands all of

that kind of thing?
They don't.

That whole album [[[Freak Out!]]] is Southern California. Nobody else knows what a swimming pool is.
No, this is a new type of lyric that I'm getting into. These are also social-political things. This is straight bizarre lyric, based on – I made research tapes of behavior of some seventeen-year-old kids in Ontario, California, and this is based on those tapes.

How long do you carry some of this stuff around in your head?
Well, "Call Any Vegetable", for example, was written two weeks after we finished Freak Out!, when we were in Hawaii, and it took a year to learn how to play it. "Son Of Suzy Creamcheese" took a year to learn how to play. Can you tell why? The time, the time – it's fantastic. It's four bars of 4/ 4, one bar 8/8, one bar of 9/8 – O K? And then it goes 8/8, 9/8, 8/8, 9/8, 8/8, 9/8, then it goes 8/8, 4/8, 5/8, 6/8, and back into 4/4 again. To get it together now, we just toss it off and it becomes a flop.

Are there a lot of splices on "Absolutely Free"? I thought I detected places where there were very abrupt changes, and it hadn't been like you paused and changed tempo. but that you'd spliced one part into another. Am I right about that?
Oh, yeah. There was a lot of editing. Since that time, we've adjusted our playing so we can sound like we've been edited. I like that effect.

When I've heard jazz groups change tempos, they usually pause and make it quite apparent that the tempo is being changed.
That's silly though.

Yes, it is silly.
Because you lose the impact.

Yes. Why aren't the lyrics to "Absolutely Free" –
More intelligible?

No. Let me back up. I've heard rumors – I know rumors are unreliable – that there was some censorship problem in making this album.
Yes, there were.

And I wondered if you deliberately made the lyrics unintelligible.
No. The censorship problem was not in the lyrics being unintelligible on the record. I wanted to print the libretto as the liner notes.

That was my next question. Why wouldn't they let you?
There's a legal difference between what's on the record and what's on paper.

In other words, you can say it and not get –
You can sing it, and that's part of a work of art; but the liner notes to an album are not – you can't defend that in court as a work of art.

Who's the genius who decided that?
M-G-M legal department. And this is the one that'll really kill you. You see that copy [of the libretto to "Absolutely Free"] you've got in your hand? Look what they censored out of it – the word "thirteen"! "She's only thirteen and she knows how nasty" [from "Brown Shoes

Don't Make It]. You know what they took out? The word "thirteen," not nasty. Yes, they wanted us to say that she was ... Look: "Magnificent Instrumental, Ejaculation Number 1." They had to cross it out and change to "Climax." [Laughter] You dig? They wanted to change, "I'd like to make her do a nasty on the White House lawn," [from "Brown Shoes" ...] they wanted to change it to –

White House bathroom?
No, "I'd like to make her do the crossword puzzle on the back of TV Guide."

Are you kidding?
Read it. You want to know something else? M-G-M says, "Now, we know – you and I both know – that you want to make her do nasty on the White House lawn can mean only one thing: you want to make her shit on the White House lawn."

Oh! Wow!
That's what he said. "Now, look, there are some things that are in bad taste...."

Napalm, of course, is perfectly in good taste....
Like dig the way these guys think, man. Also, "she's only 13 and I hear she gets loaded," ["Brown Shoes" ... again] M-G-M says, "We might run into trouble, because in some states – "

You're not supposed to drink until you're eighteen. You know, in some states the legal drinking age is eighteen. I reviewed the record and I reviewed it without the libretto; and I admit I was very uptight by not having the libretto at hand; and I kind of thought that this might be some kind of publicity or money-making gimmick on your part.
The whole logic behind that is, the only way you can teach an American is by example, because they've gone past the point where they'll believe what you tell them. That's the way it is. They have to get it from a different source. They have to be shown by example. So – in other words, the American advertising system, which is one of the main evils of contemporary society – the whole idea of making people buy things that they don't need is morally wrong. And the only way you're going to mak'em know is to do it, really overdo it – buy, sell, cram. Until they finally say, "What the f*** is this?" Now, the way the libretto is going to be handled is it's going to be printed in Evergreen Review, I believe, either Evergreen or Ramparts. The idea is to carry the whole liner notes; and it will also be available in booklet form, if they want to send for it.

It seems to me very coincidental that the Beatles' new record Sgt. Pepper's ... came out the same time "Absolutely Free" did. I find a great similarity. The Beatles seem to be rejecting the idea that you have to be enslaved to commodities; and that when you're sixty-four years old, all you have is two weeks summer in the Isle of Wight.
I think it's probably more subjective than that. It sounds to me like "what's going to happen when we're sixtyfour? Are you still going to buy our shit?" It's a humorous treatment of what happens when a rock and roller gets old.

I didn't get that impression. I juxtaposed that track with the George Harrison thing in front of it ["Within You Without You"], which was talking about, "We could change the world with our love." It seems that what they're saying, "On the one hand you can go off and be free if you want. On the other hand, you can enslave yourself to buy, buy, buy, buy, buy."

I believe in what George Harrison says that you can change the world with love – if you really got it. If you really care, you can do it.

Can you love in a society that only teaches hate?
Why not? Just to be contrary, you can do it. If you really want to be a rebel, honestly try and love something. And if you really want to be gross about it, try and love the society that's shitty – try and love it enough to do something about it. If you can get enough zealots out there that believe in that sort of activity, you can't stop them, no matter what they look like and where they live, because those are the kind of people that move mountains and you can't do anything about it. They won't take no for an answer.

Let's put in a note here when this thing is edited for the magazine not to take the word "f*" out and the word "shit" out, and so forth, because that would be contrary to the spirit of the interview.**
Well, like if they're going to substitute any words substitute "do-do" for "shit," got that? And for "f***" we'll have "hunchy-punchy ." [Society has become very permissive in its acceptance of the use of four-letter uwords, especially in serious publications. We admit to being rather conservative but do permit the use of some four-letter words as this interview indicates. We recognize that in the future it will be difficult for a responsible periodical to omit the use of all four-letter words. Ed.]

California is clearly the center of the new popular music. I wonder how you relate the Mothers to some of the Northern California groups like the Jefferson Airplane, and the Grateful Dead, and though it's a Southern California group, Love. I'm curious as to how you see the relationship between you and your audience compared to the relationship between them and their audience.
The whole San Francisco scene is promoting a love relationship between the audience and the group. The group is supposed to love the audience to death.

Do you think this exists in practice?
No, I don't think so.

Have you seen this firsthand?
Sure. Because I find it equally as nonexistent as well, you go to the Avalon Ballroom and they pass out feathers and bells. That's it, man. That's phony. That's like if we were to pass out Molotov cocktails in the lobby, it'd be just as phony. It's childish, because it's like a club. The key club – you bring a feather and a bell.

What do you think is the relationship between, say, the Airplane and its following, then, if it isn't really love? Do you think it's just, as you suggested earlier, a street gang without fights?
I can't really evaluate other band's followings, because I don't know that much about the inner workings of their promotion. All I can say is that people who like the Jefferson Airplane like'em, and people who like the Grateful Dead, they like'em. People have different tastes.

How about the relationship between the Mothers and their audience?
It's a little bit different, because our initial appeal is to the outcasts, the weirdos.

Especially the L.A. weirdos. Your whole thing is steeped in the L.A. mystique.
Well, we're definitely a product of our environment. That whole band grew up in L.A. I don't see how people can lump us in with the San Francisco bullshit scene, because it doesn't

sound like San Francisco music to me, no matter how objective.... Anyway, the people that we hear about that like us – I could show you some of the fan letters. They're just unique, man. These are really the cream of the weirdos of each town, and they're coming from all over. We're getting letters from very strange places.

Do they think in political terms, or what?
Some of them do. Some of them think just in terms of like, "I feel funny because people think I'm strange." And, "Say that you like me, please, Mothers of Invention, so that I'll keep on being strange and I'll stay alive in my small town."

What do you do with those letters?
We haven't answered any of them yet. We're just now setting up our correspondence. We've got a total of about three hundred fan letters for the past year.

You take this pretty seriously, then?
Sure. Why not? Those are live people out there. If you can think of it as somebody who paid four dollars for an album, that's one way to do it, and then you send him an autographed picture. But I'll show you the material we've been preparing for fan consumption.

[Quoting Mothers' first answer to fan mail:] "We could have sent you a cheesy form letter, all purple and mimeographed, something that would probably say, 'The Mothers of Invention want to thank you blah blah for writing such a nifty letter blah and they love their fans who are so loyal and thoughtful blah and blah. But they are so busybusybusybusy that it would be virtually impossible for them to even begin to attempt to consider the possibility of any sort of warm personal reply, blah, blah, blaaahhh.' We could have sent you that sort of cheesy letter, instead we have sent you this cheesy letter, the text of which reads: " 'Dearest Wonderful and Perceptive Person: The Mothers of Invention want to thank you blah blah for writing us such a nifty letter, some of which you have written to us on toilet paper – how wonderfully original. Golly gee, we are so awful busy being thrown out of restaurants and hotels in Montreal, ignored by taxis in New York – have you had that trouble too – it's getting so you don't even have to be black not to be picked up – mugged by policemen in Los Angeles and scrutinized by the censors of all major U.S. media. Willikins! It takes so much time to do all that crap we hardly have any time to answer each of you in a warm, personal way. So: If you are a worried girl and you wrote to us because we turn you on and you want our bodies and/or you think we are cute, here is your own personal section of the letter. The answer to any and all questions is, yes, we love you even if you are fat, with pimples. If you are or are considering the possibility of becoming a boy and you think you are very hep and swinging and you wrote to us on a piece of toilet paper, this section is for you: Keep up the good work. We would like to encourage you to become even more nihilistic and destructive. Attaboy. Don't take any gas from your metal shop teacher or that creep with the flat top in physical education who wants to bust your head because you are different. Give them all the finger, just like we would give you the finger for writing to us on a piece of toilet paper ' "
Solid! End letter. That's not all, I have to type up a few more sections. OK, that's the initial reply to a fan letter, which has to be modified, because I understand that there are legal complications to saying anything sexual in a form letter.

There are legal complications to everything. Then follows: "Would you be interested in joining what's called a fan club for the Mothers? The official name of the

organization is the United Mutations. We call it that because we are certain that only a few special people might be interested in active participation. It will cost you three dollars and you must fill in the accompanying questionnaire. Name, age, sex, height, weight, address, state, zip, father's name, profession, mother's name, profession. Answer these questions briefly: Who is God? ESP? Yes? No? Describe. Best way to deseribe my social environment is: If I had my way I would change it to: How will you change your social environment? When? What are you afraid of? What sort of help can the Mothers give you? "On another sheet of paper describe your favorite dream, or nightmare, in clinical detail. Send both sheets with three dollars to the address above and in return we will send you useful information about the Mothers, a small package with some other things you might be interested in. Thank you. Your signature in ink, please." This is the follow-up letter that accompanies the package: "Hello. Thank you for responding to our initial proposal. It is necessary to know a few more things about you. We hope you won't mind answering another form letter, but our files require it for continued membership. If you are interested in this worthwhile program of let's call it self-help, please be advised that our work can be continued only if your membership is kept paid yearly and we have periodic reports of your activities within the context of our program. You will be notified by mail for your next membership report. For now, please fill in this form and return it to us and read the enclosed material carefully. We are happy you took an interest in us. Answer these questions briefly. Please enclose a small photo of yourself. "Are you a mutation? What can you do to help us? People's minds: how many do you control? Why not more? How do you control your subjects? Do they know? Do other people know? How do you avoid problems? Do you group think? Is there another operator near you? Who? Does he/she belong to our association? If no, why not? Describe your relationship with your parents. How can the Mothers assist you? Your signature in ink, please. Date."

I take it you're mostly interested in young people, in particular high school students?
Well, they seem to be the only ones left alive.

Perhaps this is a mis-estimate on my part, but so much of your thing seems to be directed towards the high school scene, for example, "I'm losing status at the high school" [from "Status Back Baby"]. For people who know what the public education system is, they're obviously going to be in sympathy with you. They won't be convinced because you've already reached your conclusions on their own. They don't need any more propagandizing. And the ones who aren't convinced, they're not going to be convinced by that, because they're not even going to listen to that record, or if they do, they won't listen to it a second time. So then, who is going to be –
Influenced by "I'm losing status at the high school?"

Yeah, and that whole genre: "You're Probably Wondering Why I'm Here," and "Mr. America, walk on by" (from Hungry Freaks, Daddy).
Unfortunately, that's the genre that brought these fan letters to us.

So there are, in small towns and so forth, all these people who really think that there's something wrong with them because they're losing status at the high school?
That's right. Think about this for a minute: If you were to graphically analyze the different types of directions of all the songs in the Freak Out! album, there's a little something in

there for everybody. At least one piece of material is slanted for every type of social orientation within our consumer group, which happens to be six to eighty. Because we got people that like what we do, from kids six years old screaming on us to play "Wowie Zowie." Like I meet executives doing this and that, and they say, "My kid's got the record, and 'Wowie Zowie's' their favorite song."

How did the kid get the record in the first place?
They may have an older sister or brother who got hold of the thing and who played it at the house, but the young kids that hear it like "Wowie Zowie," and then there are other high school kids – they're all trying to find something on there that they can identify with. I've gotten a lot of replies that kids like the "Watts Riot song" (Trouble Comin' Every Day).

That's a beautiful song; I'm surprised you don't do that more.
But the heaviest stuff on there is "It Can't Happen Here" and "Who Are The Brain Police?" Nobody's penetrated "Brain Police" – yet.

Who are the Brain Police?
I can't tell you that – it's a religious song. But the ones who say they like "Brain Police" like it because it's got some screaming and they love it. The ones that like "Help, I'm A Rock", you know that mumbling part at the end, haven't come to realize what the musical structure of that is. They'll perceive it because it's got some gag lines in it.

Who played the piano solo on it?
I did.

That's what I thought. Hence, "If you want to become a piano player, go out and buy a Cecil Taylor record." [As Zappa stated in Hit Parader].
That whole Freak Out! album is to be as accessible as possible to the people who wanted to take the time to make it accessible. That list of names in there, if anybody were to research it, it would probably help them a great deal.

The list of names preceded by, "We have been influenced by – , do not hold it against them?"
Yeah.

There again you seem to be very conscious of packaging, promoting, that sort of thing.
Of course. The Mothers were packaged two years before we actually put the band together, because I had been doing motivational research in the field, watching successes and failures of other people in the industry.

What were you doing before you got the Mothers together?
I had a recording studio, and prior to that I was in advertising.

I heard you talking about UCLA. Did you go to college?
No. I dropped out of junior college after one semester.

So you're a self-educated man; but then, everybody's a self-educated man.
It's almost like college was invented by Madison Avenue so that after you've gone for a certain number of years and spent a certain amount of money on products which they're helping to sell to you, you'll get a piece of paper that says you're educated.

That's definitely where it's at; and all you have to do is teach in one to find that out. Nobody's interested in getting an education in college – they're simply interested in getting out. That might not be true at Harvard – there may be a few freaks around at the top schools who really want to learn something. But if you go out in the provinces, like the University of Pittsburgh, forget it.

I'm interested in how you would classify the Mothers, assuming you were forced to classify them. In a musical sense, if you talk about a spectrum in music that extends from straight rock groups like the Jefferson Airplane and the other San Francisco groups on the one hand, to jazz groups like Archie Shepp's group or John Coltrane's group. Now in these terms, how would you go about describing the Mothers?
It's a collection of opposites. Our music exists because we jam things that don't belong together. In other words, we attempt to do the impossible and demonstrate that it can be done. One aspect of what we do, most people have ignored until now. They take for granted the fact that we go from one speed in one time signature to another speed in another time signature in a split second, without any hang-ups, without any planning in advance. We change tempos and change songs with no forewarning most of the time. Like, maybe I'll only tell them we're going into three songs out of a set. That's what all that jumping around is about. If I jump and hit the floor, that's the first beat of the next bar, and they have to figure out what the song is by two notes. We trained to put the thing together that way. And of course we have other signals which indicate certain sound events are supposed to take place, like that rumble and smash and speedup and noise.

One thing I've noticed about the Mothers is that they're very definitely an improvisational band. They play solos; and they seem very heavily jazz-influenced, especially your saxophonist [Bunk Gardner].
It's amazing to note that we had to force him to play in that [Coltranesque] vein, when we first had him in the band he was playing straight out of 1955 – Howard Ramsey's Light Love All-Stars.

Oh, really? Well, now it sounds to me like vintage 1962 John Coltrane, especially his work on the soprano; and also I hear some of the new music on the tenor and alto. You listen to that, then, I take it – beside Cecil [Taylor], you listen to Coltrane, too?
Well, I don't own any Coltrane, except that he's one artist on the anthology album that Tom Wilson produced in 1950. The one that has Cecil Taylor and Sun Ra. It's called Jazz in Transition – it's a classic.

I thought I detected in your music a strong Coltrane overtone especially in the use of modes for extended improvisations. This is what puzzled me, though: Why do you keep the steady emphasis on 2 and 4, the steady backbeat?
So the people can identify at least the rhythm.

Have you thought about playing dances at all?
Yes. They dance, in a bizarre way. Los Angeles is the best place for us to play for dancing because the kids dance better there; they dance free. Here in town you get these pigs trying to do the boogaloo and all that stuff to what we do, and their legs get all tangled up and they fall down.

Ever since I got the John Coltrane Live at the Village Vanguard Again, I've been dancing around the house to it, and there's not a fixed beat. From that, it occurred to me, people have said that one of the reasons jazz is losing an audience is because you can't dance to it, but that's nonsense. You can dance to it, but you

can't just do the boogaloo to it. You can dance to any piece of music you hear – in fact, you can dance even if you don't hear music.

To go back to that earlier question, I guess you see yourself as melding together all these things.
Yes. We want to try and put together a theatre of a bizarre sort. The spoken word is differentiated from the sung word, in its rhythmic sense, as in poetry. But even normal speech patterns are beautiful in themselves. Because the way people talk, it doesn't make a shit what they're saying; in fact, most of the time what they're saying is really ugly. But when you think about the rhythm, or the way certain gas-station attendants might speak, you know, what they're saying is useless; but if you just listen to it as a piece of music ... I like to simulate things like that.

You're very conscious of that, aren't you? For instance, I notice when Jim Black sings, "TV dinner by the pool, I'm so glad I finished school" [in Brown Shoes Don't Make It], he does it the way that guy would say it. I've heard that guy talk, I don't know what his name is but – that's a typical Southern migrant to Los Angeles at the age of seven, now working in a defense plant. There's some Jungian symbol fixed in my brain that immediately clicked: "I've heard that voice before!"
It's all around you; it rules the world. It rules California.

I think it rules the world. Actually, it's cannon fodder like the rest of us.
Love, a group I'm not terribly impressed with as a whole, also have a saxophonist and are trying to combine jazz improvisation with rock.
Actually, what they're trying to do is to imitate our band.

I heard them first. Is it just coincidental that their album was released first?
Well, let me tell you of a few interesting coincidences that I've noticed, that lead me to suspect that we're making more of an impact on the industry than the people in the industry would like to admit. I was mailed a picture of Paul McCartney many months ago, from a girl in Europe, with my mustache and my tie, with my earphones, conducting an orchestra. And this is about the time I was preparing an album for Capitol where I was conducting an orchestra.

What do you mean, your earphones? I don't understand.
I mean, that's the way I ... it looked like me in the studio and I really shit in my pants when I saw it. I've never met them. It was a bizarre coincidence. And like him conducting the orchestra on their recent album [Sgt. Pepper]. I don't know how much that amounts to, because the orchestra is used as an effect.

Have you listened to that album carefully?
Yes.

Do you think there is any similarity between *Lovely Rita, Meter Maid* and certain parts of Help, I'm A Rock?
The way they're doing "huffa-puffa, huffa-puffa" in the background? Yes, I do, as a matter of fact. There's also a coincidence in the use of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* as a reprise and the way we do America Drinks and Goes Home on Absolutely Free.

Was your album released at the time that they were preparing Sgt. Pepper?
Do you know when Absolutely Free was recorded? It was recorded before Thanksgiving last November. Before we came to New York.

What kept it from being released earlier? Was it the censorship problem?
Yes.

Do you think that the Beatles would have had access to that?
I don't know. Yes, it's possible, because rumors in the industry have a tendency to go very fast. And on the Rolling Stones' album, *Between the Buttons,* they've got that camp song *Something Happened to Me Yesterday.* But we recorded ours before theirs; though theirs was released before ours.

Just from the grapevine I know that there are several English groups like the Yardbirds and Eric Burdon's that seem to be intrigued by what you're doing. Can you think of any other English groups, or American groups for that matter, that have made the Mothers' influence explicit?
No, but let me tell you how far it's gone with the *Animals.* First of all, it's common knowledge in the industry that, the way it was explained to me (and this is not my opinion of what they've done up 'til now), that they were the typical noncreative rock-and-roll group who have made a success performing material that was not necessarily original and which was not written by any member of the group.

They've said that. Eric Burdon has said that they've had great problems writing their own material.
OK, so I had an experience arranging some stuff for them, and I found that not only were they not particularly original, but were hung up in that R & B bag, which is deadening when you get little white boys trying to be little black boys, screaming the blues and being funky and all – that's shitty.

The best thing about the Rolling Stones was that they didn't do that very long.
Yeah, but when they did it, it was funky. It wasn't necessarily colored-sounding blues, but it was really funky.

Yes, British working-class funk.
And it was valid for that, except when they tried to do too much Chuck Berry. Now, after Eric went to a party at my place, I don't know what happened in his head – I believe he was a little bit psychedelically jacked-up that evening or the two nights that he spent over at my I place. It must have been something, because now there's this album that they recorded about a month or two ago with [Tom] Wilson in Los Angeles; their new group is psychedelic. One of their songs is seven minutes long. It's a poem about the Black Plague and it's accompanied by tape-recorded sounds of a monastery. They've got another song about San Francisco policemen ... Wilson said they went into the studio and played *Suzy Creamcheese* note for note – I mean the one on the Freak Out! album – played Return of the Son of Monster Magnet note for note. So if that's the kind of stuff they're practicing, if they use that album as Point Zero to start from, that's dynamite, man. If every group in the industry would do that, and I would love to see them do it, the whole complexion of the music would change in a hurry, and it would be very gratifying to hear that weirdness on the radio coming from people other than us.

Do you have any indication that your music is catching on I in the industry?
Well, I notice that every time we work with another act – we usually accompany somebody who's "a star." Whenever the star group is on a couple of sets, the next time we hear them they're playing | something that sounds like something we do. I realized that from the first time we worked with the Blues Project till the next time we saw them, they were doing songs with time changes in them. But they were stopping in between, so they counted off

and started again. They still hadn't gotten down to the point where they could actually bring themselves to actually jump in the air and land on the first beat of the first bar. And other groups? We just notice that experimental things are creeping into their bag. And although the people who are trying these things believe what they're doing is original and all that, I can't help but feel that we had something to do with motivating them to try something more unusual than they might have if they hadn't heard the Freak Out! album or heard that somebody was doing something weird. When you're writing a song, as most of the groups do, it's a cooperative effort, they all get together, you have certain alternatives that you can do in putting that song together. At a certain point in the arranging of the tune, you can decide whether or not the bridge is going to be a simple bridge or if it's going to be a bit weird. Most of the time now, the kids are choosing something that might be unique – a time-signature change, a weird chord here and there, a suspension, you know. It's happening; their idea of what music is is broadening!

Do you hear this in the San Francisco groups too?
San Francisco still seems to be either hung up on modality, plastic Yardbird imitations, or R & B. I got soul, baby, even though I'm Jewish.

In what category would you fit the Jefferson Airplane?
Well, they started out as being modal city. I liked the stuff on the first album more than the second. As a matter of fact, they asked me to produce their third album. I couldn't do it, 'cause I couldn't leave the [Garrick] theatre [in New York] just to go out there and do it, which means a loss of a lot of money.

Have you produced any albums yet?
For other people? I've produced singles for other people and I'm getting ready to produce an album of a group called the Auto Salvage, which is very promising.

Have there been any singles released by the Mothers?
Three.

What happened to them?
Well, How Could I Be Such A Fool?, which was released as our first single, sold 4,000 in Detroit. Imagine us on the radio selling records in Detroit.

What was the B side?
The B side was It Can't Happen Here. [Laughter.] I mean, I couldn't go too straight. Then came the "Watts riot song" Trouble Comin' Every Day in a scaled-down version with Who Are The Brain Police? on the other side. If the DJ put that thing on to test – if they ever got around to checking it over – forget it!

How well did that sell? Did it do anything?
A record doesn't sell unless it gets on the radio. Then the third single was There's A Big Dilemma About My Big Leg Emma, with Why Don't You Do Me Right? on the other side.

That hasn't been put out, has it?
Yes it has. I'll give you a copy of it.

No, I meant on an album.
No, fortunately, and I hope it never is, because it was a straight commercial attempt to just go in with a piece of absolute shit for a market that is based on shit. It was an experiment.

How did it work?
Not too well.

That's encouraging in a way. It shows that you can't merchandise straight shit.
Well, we could. I have another way. There's different categories of straight shit. That was straight-shit jug band, OK? The other side was straight shit R & B, with a little humor thrown in. Maybe people were offended by the fact that I did a takeoff on Wild Thing, or Sit Down I Think I Love You, or something like that.

Now the next single that we're going to put out is a beautiful song and it's done with a beautiful arrangement. It's got some lyrics that will go directly to the consciousness level of the thirteen-year-old girl. It's a song about a thirteen-year-old girl who has parents that don't understand her, who gets her rocks off by listening to her favorite singers on the radio and digging their picture on the wall, and living in that putrid world that they invent for themselves locked away in their bedrooms. It's a song that takes the attitude, "We know where you're at, and if you need any assistance, just give us a buzz." It's not like we say, "Come to us," but just by saying that we know what you're doing in your bedroom, which is more than anybody else has said so far, at least we came out and said it. And I think it will be a winner.

How long is it?
It's about two minutes.

It seems inconceivable that five years, three years, maybe two years ago, that you could put out two albums like the two you've put out, that the record companies would be convinced that there was any market for that material. Do you agree with that assessment? And if you do, what do you think has caused the change?
First of all, the market that we reach always existed, but the manner in which we reached that market was carefully planned; and the way we were presented to the record company was carefully planned. We were still turned down by every major company, which was best because we wound up with Wilson; I think that was a great advantage. He's been responsible, having been producing a long time, for most major weirdnesses in music. He was the first man to record Cecil Taylor, and he recorded Dylan and Simon and Garfunkel. He was the one that made Dylan go rock and roll.

Dylan's Subterranean Homesick Blues was a monster record. I heard that thing and I was jumping all over the car. And then when I heard the one after that, Like a Rolling Stone, I wanted to quit the music business, because I felt: "If this wins and it does what it's supposed to do, I don't need to do anything else," but it didn't do anything. It sold; but nobody responded to it the way that they should have. They should have listened to that and said, "Hey, that record got on the radio. Now, wait a minute, we've got a chance to say something, you know? The radio is for us to use as a weapon." It didn't happen right away, and I was a little disappointed. I figured, "Well, shit, maybe it needs a little reinforcing."

Obviously it does, because people respond to those things and yet they can't immediately go beyond just responding emotionally and internally. They can't like go and do something at once.
You've got to make them involve themselves.

Exactly. There was a very poignant thing I read, I believe it was Mary McCarthy writing about Vietnam in The New York Review, seeing the soldiers there – they're all nineteen-year-olds – singing Blowin' in the Wind and Where Have All the Flowers

Gone? And then going out and killing the gooks – kill for peace! So obviously just identifying with "the message," while certainly a step forward, is not sufficient.
Listen, we had three Marines in full-dress uniform on stage one night with us.

What did you do then?
I'll tell you the story. A Marine was killed in the Village, remember? And there was a rumor that every Marine within shooting distance was coming down to beat up everybody they found with long hair. The week following that rumor, we're rehearsing in the theatre and in walk three full-dress Marines. So I said, "Oh, hello there, why don't you come in and sit down." I just went on with our rehearsal; we didn't pay any attention to them. When we were done, they said, "We just bought your album and we really like it." These kids, nineteen years old, stationed on the carrier Wasp at shore here, clean, you know? I said, "Well, I'm glad you do. Hey, listen, how would you guys like to work with us a tonight?" They were really turned on. I said, "Can you sing?" They said, "Yeah." "What do you know?" "Well, I know, Everybody Must Get 'I Stoned and House of the Rising Sun. So we went across the street to have dinner; I ate and they practiced their songs. Come back, we do this number. I said, "Now look, there's one little thing I want you to do. When I give you the signal, I want all three of you guys to lunge for the microphone and start screaming 'Kill!' " So we played like that "Archie" [Shepp], weirdness, with the dissonant chords and all that, and on cue they ran right to the mikes, started screaming "Kill!" The audience just went – they couldn't handle it. Then when it was over, they clapped. So I said to the audience, "Thank you"; and then Ray [Collins] says to the audience, "Thank you"; and then when I pointed to the Marines to have them say "Thank you," the first one walks up to the mike and says: "Eat the apple, fuck the core" [i.e., Corps]. And everybody went, "Whew!" Oh wow. And then the second one, he comes up and says: "Eat the apple, fuck the core." Point to the third one; he goes up, he says: "Hey, you know, I feel the same way as my other two buddies: Eat the apple, fuck the core. Some of us love our mothers more." Full-dress blues, man – they just burned a dozen flags.

Court martial!
Right. Court-martial city, all right? So then, we took an intermission and they stuck around. I said, "Do you guys know ... ?" "I don't care, man. They can only get you once." All right, go back on. I told Gail to get the doll. This is the first time we ever used the doll. We had this doll that somebody gave us, it was really shitty – big plastic doll. Bring it down and I say, "Hey, ladies an' gennlemen, the guys are, uh, gonna sing Everybody Must Get Stoned. They go through all that shit and I says, "Now, we're gonna have basic training. Uh, ladies an' gennlemen, this is a gook baby; and the Marines are going to mutilate it before your very eyes. Kill it!" Tossed it to them, they ripped the arms off, beat it up, stomped on it, and just completely tore it apart. After they're all done, the music got real quiet, the lights went down, and I held it by the hair and showed the audience all the damaged parts of the doll's body, pretending ... . There was one guy in the front row, a Negro cat just come back from Vietnam, was crying. It was awful and I ended the show there.

I guess you did.
You know, "Thank you. Good-bye." It was an atrocity, it was the most ...

That sounds like Lenny Bruce at the London Palladium, you know that thing he does with the entertainer? A leper on the Art Baker show: you asked for it – an arm.
Oh, nooooooo.

Who says that [on the Absolutely Free album]? You say that, right?
Right. Oh, noooo. Oh, nooooo.

You seem to be very entranced with that phrase on Absolutely Free.
Well, that was a phase I was in. Also, I had an idea of the commercial value of any phrase repeated in that context. In other words, the catch phrase of that album, that's the Suzy Creamcheese of that album.

What is the meaning of that prune and vegetable symbolism? Or is it just nonsense?
Dada dynamite. You know, if you try and respond to that – like try and tune in to that and respond to it like you would ordinary images. That would have the effect, if you let that grab you and move you around the way it's supposed to. it'd jerk you apart. Try and tune into that and flow with it – "moonbeam through the prune" and tune into that and flow, the "magic Go-cart."

I asked you this before and I don't think I got a definite answer. Do you think you could have put this material out five or six years ago and have gotten the same response?
I don't think we could have five or six years ago, but let me tell you something. I've got tapes of original versions of a lot of these songs, which were recorded five or six years ago when I had my studio. We have since refurbished and tried to bring them up to date, in the current rhythmic formats and things like that. Like there was a time when shuffles were popular, but they're not exactly in vogue now. Popular rhythms change, which is an interesting study in itself. Also the use of parallel fifths is coming back and the use of flatted fifths in a blues guitar line, which was gone for years. All guitars heard on top 40 records were very sterile white notes – bend a third; and a bullshit chord, maybe hit a sixth in there once in a while. But now they're getting back to that distorted nastiness that you hear on old blues records.

You do a lot of that on those short breaks.
Because my whole guitar-playing background is not jazz. I can't play jazz worth a shit and I never would claim to.

What is your musical background?
Self-taught. Listen to records.

But, you listen to everything? You seem to have an encyclopedic knowledge.
And I remember what I hate.

How did you get into music at all?
I was playing since I was fifteen.

In rock bands?
Yes. I started out playing drums, in San Gabriel [Calif.] in a band called the Ramblers.

Why didn't you go directly into music? Why did you go into advertising?
Well, I was married for five years and I was an eight-to-fiver. But I was more than an eight-to-fiver, because during the time I was doing that I was also working in what you might call a tiptoe-through-the-tulips-type band, wearing a white tuxedo coat (which I've still got), black pants, black patent-leather shoes, hair slicked back, choreography, played three twist numbers a night, and the rest of the stuff was "Oh I How We Danced on the Night" ...

You condensed that experience beautifully on America Drinks and Goes Home.
Because a lot of the guys in the group have gone through that shit.

You did that. I cried when I heard that.
Did you get that guy swinging back and forth in front of the microphone like they do?

Oh, yeah. Got the cash register, the glasses, the drunken voices, the piano arpeggios, the shuffle rhythm on the drums – it's all there. Which is one of the reasons why jazz musicians don't want to play whiskey clubs anymore. And the audience doesn't understand it. You know, like, "We pay those niggers. Why don't they want to go and be slaves any more?"
Yeah, "If you won't play, shine my shoes, goddamit!"

Precisely.
The one thing that I think is really good about our music is that the settings for the lyrics are so carefully designed. Supposing you had to listen to America Drinks and Goes Home for a million times – it would drive you crazy, for one thing. But eventually, if you're the average stupid layman who hates music anyway, you might realize how perfect that setting is. Those words, man. Those things are so carefully constructed that it breaks my heart when people don't dig into them and see all the levels that I put into them.

That ballad on America Drinks and Goes Home – I hear Tommy Dorsey playing *Getting Sentimental,* or something like that, every time it comes on. It's kind of the prototype of all modern sentimental crap *Tin Pan Alley* songs.
Because it was written based on the same subconscious formula that all those pukers use. You know, II-V-I chord progressions, modulating all the way around. They modulate normally in a regular song in a circle of fifths. But this changes key and modulates and it gets weird. There is something happening in all those changes. And the melody, if you just were to play the melody as a straight thing, it's an interesting tune. But those stupid, stupid words, and in that setting with the cash registers and all that – we spent hours putting that together. Herbie [Herbie Cohen, manager of the Mothers] was playing the cash register. We rehearsed the crowd noises. The talk track itself, which is underplayed in there, is funny, because they're saying things like, "I got a new Mustang" [Laughter], and like the girls are saying, "Sally, will you go with me to the bathroom?" You know, that stuff?

Is that all in the libretto?
You can't hear it on the record.

I know you can't. But it's great – it's hysterical. You hear all those drunks, man, you just want to go in there and kill them all.
But that's not all that's happening – technology is not up to reproducing that one song. I'll tell you what's in it. You've got the song itself. And the tune, which is a parody of all the changes. You've got the lyrics, which is a parody of all the lyrics. You've got the vocal performance of the lyrics, which is a parody of that. You've got the improvised dialogue, which is a parody of everybody's closing bullshit.

I know; that's what's so pathetic.
You've got the sound of the setting, of the glasses and the cash register, which is right in there. You've got the crowd mumble, which was carefully programmed, like choreographed. Then on top of that, which you can't even hear, there's a fight going on. We had the crowds separated in two rooms. In the main studio we had ten people sitting around the microphone, doing these lines on cue, with the cash register over here and the

glass on one microphone. Then in a vocal booth off to the side we had Ray and Jim [Black] and Roy [Estrada] going through this number. We had Bunk [Gardner] trying to pick up two girls. You know, "What's a girl like you doing in a place like this?" All that stuff. And then Jim's an Okie wanting to beat up a Mexican, who is Ray. They started out as good buddies and they're drinking beer together, and find out ... the Indian accuses the Mexican of going out with his wife and they punch it out. And meanwhile, the chicks tell this other guy to fuck off because he's coming on too strong, you know, "What kind of girls do you think we are?" And it's all happening in there, but you can't listen to it all. You've got to have it on ten tracks so you can walk around the room and see where it's all coming from.

It must take hours to do that, not to say anything of recording costs.
Well, the cost of the second album was maybe a third of what Freak Out! was, $21,000.

$21,000?
That's right. That's a heck of an investment for an unknown group.

For two LPs that's about five times what it would take for a jazz group.
We really had a good budget for that, which has not been offered to us since, because at the time we recorded the second album, the sales had dipped on Freak Out!

I meant to ask you earlier, when we were talking about your singles, how has the album done overall? Have you seen an audit on that?
Sure, I'll tell you very happily that the first album is around 150,000 right now; and they project sales of 250,000 for the second album by August. And Freak Out! still sells regularly between two and eight thousand copies a week, every week in places like Montana, Wyoming, Florida, Virginia, and all those places, man.

I know it's one of the top sellers in the record store in what passes for a campus area in Pittsburgh.
Well, you see, it doesn't stop. It's the kind of thing where somebody can hear it at a party and they'll remember the name of it.

Some of my students at Carnegie Tech turned me on to it and the Andy Warhol album at the same time.
I like that album. I think that Tom Wilson deserves a lot of credit for making that album, because it's folk music. It's electric folk music, in the sense that what they're saying comes right out of their environment.

It's folk in the sense of relating to a milieu.
Love is that kind of group too, because what they sing about is the folk music of the L.A. freak. What we sing about is the folk music of our environment from Pomona to L.A. You know, being kicked around in go-go bars, and like that.

You're older too, I think.
Our average age is thirty. The age range is twenty-four to thirty-five.

What Ever Happened To The Mothers Of Invention?

By Frank Zappa

Source: Hit Parader, No. 48, april 1970, pages 23-24
Transcription: Roger Maurice.

The Mothers of Invention, the infamous & repulsive rocking teen combo, is not doing concerts any more. Jimmy Carl Black (the Indian of the group) has formed another ensemble which he calls Geronimo Black (named after his youngest child). Don (Dom De Wild) Preston is collaborating with avant garde dancer Meredith Monk in performances of electronic music. Ian Robertson Underwood is preparing material for a solo album. Roy Estrada, Bunk Gardner, Buzz Gardner & Art Tripp are doing studio work in Hollywood. Motorhead (James Euclid) Sherwood is working on his bike & preparing for a featured role in a film with Captain Beefheart. Frank Zappa is producing various artists for his record companies, Bizarre and Straight (which he co-owns with Herb Cohen), working on film & television projects & is currently writing arrangements for a new album by French jazz violinist Jean Luc Ponty. This Ponty album, to be released on World Pacific, will mark the first attempt by any other artist to record a whole album's worth of Zappa's writing, exclusive of The Mothers of Invention interpretations.

It is possible that, at a later date, when audiences have properly assimilated the recorded work of the group, a reformation might take place. The following is a brief summary of The Mothers' first five years of musical experimentation & development.

In 1965 a group was formed called The Mothers. In 1966 they made a record which began a musical revolution. The Mothers invented Underground Music. They also invented the double fold rock album & the concept of making a rock album a total piece of music. The Mothers showed the way to dozens of other groups (including The Beatles & Stones) with their researches & experimentation in a wide range of musical styles & mediums.

The Mothers set new standards for performance. In terms of pure musicianship, theatrical presentation, formal concept & sheer absurdity, this one ugly band demonstrated to the music industry that it was indeed possible to make the performance of electric music a valid artistic expression.

In 1967 (April through August), The Garrick Theater on Bleecker Street in New York was devastated by cherry bombs, mouldering vegetables, whipped cream, stuffed giraffes & depraved plastic frogs... the whole range of expressive Americana... all of it neatly organized into what people today would probably call a "Love Rock Long-Hair Tribal Musical". The Mothers called it "Pigs & Repugnant: Absolutely Free" (an off-Broadway musical)... it was in its third month when "Hair" first opened.

The Mothers was the first big electric band. They pioneered the use of amplified and/or electronically modified woodwind instruments... everything from piccolo to bassoon. They were the first to use the wah wah pedal on guitar as well as horns and electric keyboard instruments. They laid some of the theoretical groundwork which influenced the design of many commercially manufactured electro-musical devices.

The Mothers managed to perform in alien time signatures & bizarre harmonic climates with a subtle ease that led many to believe it was all happening in 4/4 with a teen-age back beat. Through their use of procedures normally associated with contemporary "serious music" (unusual percussion techniques, electronic music, the use of sound in blocks, strands, sheets and vapors), The Mothers were able to direct the attention of a large number of young people to the work of many contemporary composers.

In 1968, Ruben Sano lifted his immense white-gloved hand, made his fingers go "snat!" and instantly Neo-Greaser Rock was born. A single was released from Ruben's boss album (remember "Cruisin' With Ruben & The Jets"?) called "Deseri". It was played on many AM stations (actually rising to #39 on the Top Forty at KIOA in Des Moines, Iowa) until programmers discovered Ruben & The Jets was really The Mothers under a disguise. Meanwhile, the so called Underground FM stations could boast (because they were so cool and far out) that they actually went so far as to play The Mothers of Invention albums on their stations. Yes. Boldly they'd whip a few cuts from "Freak Out" on their listeners between the steady stream of important blues numbers.
And then of course, there was "Uncle Meat", recorded back to back with "Ruben & The Jets" (a somewhat unusual production procedure). In spite of the musical merit of the album, the only thing that drew any attention was the fact that several words, in common usage, were included in candid dialogue sections.
Awaiting release is a collection of 12 complete albums of Mothers' music, a retrospective exhibition of the group's most interesting work, covering a span from two years prior to the actual formation of the ensemble, through August 1969. Included in the collection is documentary material from first rehearsals, tracing the development of the group through to its most recent live performances in the U.S. and Europe, some of which have become almost legendary. To those people who cared at all about The Mothers' musical explorations (and also those who didn't care & who wish to be merely entertained), this collection will prove of great interest.
Frank Zappa

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http://www.geocities.com/zerttrez/phase2/72perlich.htm
Transcribed 1994 By evilbob@music-planet.com

Martin Perlich Interviews Frank Zappa - 1972

This is the transcription of a recorded interview with Frank Zappa (**Z:**) conducted sometime in 1972 (probably late 1972) by Martin Perlich (**Q:**). This interview was sent to me on tape by my Deutsche Friend, Georg Deppe (whom I humbly thank for the pleasure thereof, and look forward to further correspondence).
Q: I know from your various raps in the past and from reading about you that you have a great deal of interest in classical music.
Z: Yeah, I do. It's what I listen to mostly, I don't listen to too much rock and roll.
Q: How come?
Z: I don't think that it gets me off as good as some contemporary classical pieces.
Q: Like what?
Z: My favorite composers to listen to are: Stravinsky, Webern, Varese, and Penderecki. I think I find more things of interest for my ear in those composers than I do in any number of pop groups that you could name.
Q: Do you think that there's a possible audience for let's say.... Webern or Penderecki?
Z: Of course there is.
Q: Where is it?
Z: Well, that's beside the point. The audience exists - it's perhaps not as large as the audience for Grand Funk Railroad but it's there nonetheless and is in need of servicing. There are some people who might be interested in hearing that music who have never heard it before and who might just like to go out and see what it does to their mind to get a little bit of it on 'em.
Q: In the past, political types have talked of the music of Webern, the, uh Post-Webern really.... Penderecki and his friends as being elitist music - music that is difficult for masses of people to listen to.
Z: Then I would assume from that line of reasoning that the ideal music of all time must be that of the crudest form of rock and roll. I don't think that that's elitist music by any stretch of the imagination.
Q: Do you think it's easy for people to listen to?
Z: It depends on the person who's listening to it and what he expects to get out of it, y'know.
Q: What do people come to music for, do you think?
Z: Well, in America, mostly for entertainment. I doubt that they're going to derive as much entertainment value out of watching, say, a Webern string quartet performed as, say, some rock and roll band who has a guitar player who eats his guitar onstage. That would probably be more entertaining for them, but I don't think that's down to what the music is really about.
Q: Is the music of the MOI influenced by your interest in classical music?
Z: Yeah, I would say so.
Q: How? Rhythmically? Harmonically?
Z: Both.
Q: Other than taking other people's work and using it for theme and variations as you do in the Invocation and Ritual Dance and various other places in your work, do you think that there is a link between what we call the classical world and your music?

Z: Yes, there is a link. It's rhythmic and it's harmonic.
Q: Pierre Boulez says of Stravinsky that Stravinsky was the first person, specifically in the Rite Of Spring, to write rhythm that most of Western music until that time, starting with Palestrina had written harmony.
Z: I don't know whether I could agree with that a hundred percent.
Q: Do you think that you play harmony, or rhythm, or a combination of the two?
Z: I think that you're getting into some deep stuff right there unless you want to get into a big philosophical discussion...
Q: (interrupts) I do.
Z: For a teen-age radio station, you kidding me?
Q: I'll kid ya.
Z: Okay. Well my premise is that you can have harmony constructed out of rhythms. That's the way I look at it and without getting into a series of charts, graphs, diagrams and explaining technically how all that's done, that's one of the things that my listening to forms of music other than rock and roll has brought to the performance of The Mothers. I would probably tend to agree with Lukas Foss's evaluation of The Rite Of Spring although it's one of my favorite pieces, he feels that it's sort of like Bigger and Better Rimsky-Korsakov. In a way it is. It's more than that, but I think that the L'Histoire Du Soldat has probably got a lot more going for it in terms of real innovation and its rhythmic vitality; interesting sonorities that just didn't exist in chamber music prior to that time.
Q: You said you sorta wanted to put off a philosophical discussion, it's clear, however, that you're into what music does and how audiences address music; you're quite obviously unhappy that the lowest common denominator seems so often to rise to the top - at least at the economic pile in American music; you seem to think that Grand Funk Railroad is something less than ideal. What is ideal? What is the music experience about and what kinds of things do you bring to it? What do you expect your audience to do?
Z: Well, first of all I do not wish to state that Grand Funk Railroad is less than ideal. Grand Funk Railroad IS ideal for people who like that kind of music and I don't want you to misconstrue what I say. I happen to be interested in performing a type of music that perhaps is not as interesting to as large a number of people as the number of people that get off on that other kind of music, y'know. But I'm not interested in that other kind of music so I'm not bothered with it.
Q: I sat in an audience once and something didn't work; one of the amplifiers of the last of The Mothers bands, and people wanted you to play and were applauding and you came forward and lectured them on how they wouldn't know the difference anyhow but it made some difference to you. It's not done often in pop music.
Z: It should be done more often in pop music. It should be done in classical music too because if it's not done the audience is going to continue to come to a performance saying "Merely entertain me. Just go up there and you be a juke box only we can see you moving around." Unless you do something to alter that image it'll just stay the same forever. People will just go down there and expect musicians to be robots spewing off some kind of little noise that they can identify with, and I don't think that's what music's all about.
Q: What then is it all about? Are you interested in writing for some small segment of the population or are you interested in raising the standard of the audience listening habits?
Z: I'm not interested in doing either of the above. What I'm interested in doing is writing music that I want to hear, okay? And if there happen to be some people who have similar taste to me, then they would like to listen to that too. However the music is made available to anybody who wants to hear it; the concerts are open to the public; the records are on sale to anybody who wants to buy 'em; the radio stations are free to pick and choose what they want to play; it's sort of a low-pressure operation.
Q: But for those of us who have known Frank Zappa only through his records and The Mothers records, particularly over the years and have come to love you and know you

through that music, when they find that you're going on into areas which they maybe aren't prepared to go in, they are a little disappointed and they say "Why?" and that's the only question that I'm prepared to ask.
Z: Well, the question I'm prepared to ask is "Why should somebody be disappointed?" What's disappointing about having somebody do some exploring for you? If I'm going into an area that you're not interested in going into, fine - you stay home. I'll tell you what happened when I get back.
Q: Send a postcard at the very least.
Z: Sure. I'll do you a public service. I'll find out what's out there. The only problem is, if you don't go there with me you're gonna have to take my word for it when I give you my report. That's not too smart. You should at least come along for the ride and find out what's happening out there.
Q: Where are you going, Frank?
Z: I'm going wherever I can, y'know.
Q: Going out into jazz and into Webern and all those places?
Z: I started off in Webern. I'm trying to get back. (laughs)
Q: Working your way home?
Z: Yeah, working my way back from Vienna.
Q: Are you really interested in that kind of music and atonal serial music - do you compose in tone rows and things like that or is it more American than that?
Z: No. I started off composing serial music. I was writing serial music when I was 18 and I never had a chance to get any of it performed because I was living in a little town where there weren't too many musicians around who could read or play well enough to count the rhythm and read all the elaborate dynamic markings that are usually connected with serial music. You know, you serialize your dynamics as well as your pitches. You can also serialize your rhythm. So I was doing that kind of stuff a long time ago.
Q: So now you're wreaking your vengeance, eh?
Z: No. What happened was, I finally did get a chance to hear some of the serial material performed and, maybe it was the performance that I finally got of it, or maybe it was just that I decided to do something else but I stopped writing serial music. I was writing all kinds of positive and negative canons and weird inverted this and retrograde that and getting as spaced-out mathematically as I could and I was going "Wait a minute (laughs), who cares about that stuff?" I had always liked rhythm and blues so here I was stuck between the slide rule and the gut bucket somewhere and I decided that I would opt for a third road someplace in between.
Q: How would you describe that road? Other than that you like the road.
Z: It's winding.
Q: And do you think that people are going to.. I hate to put this question to you in terms of audience, but that's through records and through radio stations and through Hollywood Bowl concerts - that's where it is. Do you think that audiences are going to ultimately come to it even if they don't come to it, say the first or second time?
Z: Well, let's suppose I do it and they don't come to it. But let's suppose somebody that they like better does it because they heard us do it, and they do it - they'll go to it. If Grand Funk Railroad started playing serial music, they'd love it.
Q: Do you think they would?
Z: Sure. They'd be...
Q: (interrupts) You couldn't dance to it.
Z: How do you know? All you got to do is keep a strong backbeat to it, it doesn't make too much difference what the pitches are. As a matter of fact, you start defining terms like serial or atonal and things like that, well - feedback is atonal and Jimi Hendrix used to do that up the ass, so what's the difference? He had the right showmanship to present with that and going into a serial framework might be just another logical extension. I wouldn't

say that any audience in the Youth Segment is ready to bid heavily in the serial market right now because they're too much oriented to laying back and grooving behind some musical experience but, eventually they may want to explore that because it just gives you a different feeling. If you've listened to very much of Webern's music and listen to it in the spirit with which it was constructed, it'll take you somplace quite far away. What I would like to say is this: The discussion of Webern in this conversation is almost blasphemous and I would like to suggest that if anybody's got an opportunity that they would go out and actually listen to Webern so that they know what this discussion is about. First of all, for those of you who don't know - his name is spelled: W-E-B-E-R-N. His first name is Anton, and he's dead, you understand? Go to a record store and ask for, let's see, there's one album called "The Collected Works of Anton Webern" and it's conducted by Robert Kraft - that's available in MONO.
Q: On Columbia.
Z: Yes, and there are also some other ones that aren't too shabby that are available on some European labels. Phillips has one of an Italian string quartet that's playing some of his string quartet pieces. That's very good - I can't remember what the name of the quartet is, but....
Q: (interrupts) Quartetto di Italiano.
Z: Is that it?
Q: That's it.
Z: The one with the black turtlenecks on the front.
Q: That's that.
Z: Yeah. But go down and listen to some of this music and see whether or not it's too abstract for your mind. I don't think it will be, I think that if you get over the initial shock of hearing how much space there is between the notes, and hearing that the dynamics are not extremely loud and hearing that the texture of the music is something completely different than what you're normally accustomed to, I think that if you listen to it with a little sensitivity and appreciation it might even get you off. It doesn't have much of a beat but it is alright.
Q: Give it an 83.
Z: I'd give it a hundred and sixty five. I would say that if there was anybody who has ever written music and been involved in the composing business that got close to writing some saintly stuff - it was Anton Webern because he - you talk about a purist, you got it.
Q: The Mothers early music, which was largely a product of your head, had one great enemy: the American high school. Other than that, you have not really attacked some of the things that became fashionable in the late 60s and early 70s to attack. Do you have a political stance that you like to talk about?
Z: No, I don't have a political stance that I like to talk about because I don't wish to unduly influence anybody else's political stance. As far as attacking things, the early music of the MOI was not so much attacking as making some rather accurate comments about situations that existed, and it wasn't a question of picking some trendy thing to attack and then ATTACK IT, so that everybody who also agreed that that thing that you were talking about was crap could go "Yeah, they're right on" or something. The things that I talked about in those songs were things that meant something to me. And when it became fashionable for other groups to make socio-political commentary in their material, and when I saw the results of the work that they had done in that vein, and I saw how superficial it was, and I saw that it was turning into a trend, and I also saw that the audience that was buying records listened to that stuff and said "Yeah, that's really great.", I said "I don't need to tell them anything anymore, they don't need to hear that from me, they got all these other groups that are going: 'Kick out the Jams', etc. etc.", y'know and everybody's going "Yeah, that's Heavy". So, I have some musical interests that I'd like to take care of.

Q: Do you think that you'll come back to that kind of satirical content in your music after you've taken this road?
Z: Well, I think that satirical content in music does not necessarily have to lean on the verbal aspect. There are plenty of satirical things that you can do with a mere note or a mere inflection and never say a word and it's unfortunate that the audience that thought that the satirical aspect as described above had vanished from the MOI music was insensitive to those other aspects which remained in the music. In other words, they were so verbally oriented that by the time we had progressed into other forms of commentary, they didn't go along. You missed that road, boys and girls.
Q: Getting away from talking about the high school and talking about society and getting into that whole trip that lasted, I don't know how long, a couple of years I guess, in which you were traveling and were on the road and did incredibly long musical and verbal riffs about being drunk, horny and on the road. And that was one of the things especially in the movie that a lot of people found that you had done that trip and why were you doing it again.
Z: Well, that's not exactly accurate. First of all, it did not last 2 years and second of all, the content of the music that the Mothers play is not 100% the result of me making people do things. The reason we're performing that is because it was a true story, it actually happened to Howard Kaylan. It was just a process of commemorating a piece of folklore that was peculiar to the group and there was no reason why that shouldn't be saved and I think that other groups who ignore the folklore that happens to the members within the group are missing a good shot for preserving a little history. Because I also take the position that contemporary history is going to be retained on records more accurately than it is going to be within history books. Judging from the quality of the rock and roll writers that are appearing in rock and roll publications I would say they're not doing quite as good as the people who are actually making the records. So therefore, in a hundred years if people want to find out what was going on during this period of time they'd be better off listening to the source rather than to read the thing in print. Therefore, if we are involved in things that occur on the road with groupies and assorted weird events of a sexual nature, it's better that we tell about it ourselves in a musical format and do it with the people that it occurred to than have somebody else say "And then in 1971 one time when they were out on the road at the Mudshark hotel....". You know, it's better to do it that way. Unfortunately, some people have a peculiar attitude towards things of a glandular nature connected with things of a musical nature and they say "Well, music is so high - it's HERE, and glands are WAY DOWN THERE, and we can't really get 'em together." And then they're hypocritical because then they turn around and a group that comes in and doesn't sing overtly about those things but couches their language a little bit and then does it with a little choreography, they think that's great and that's real rock and roll and I maintain there's no difference. We were just honest enough to go out there and say "This is THIS, that's THAT, and here you are and respond to it.", and the response to it was "Why, I'm hip, but of course I am offended."

The Perspective of Frank Zappa

Down Beat Magazine: September 13, 1973
by Jim Schaffer

An interview with Frank Zappa-Great! But I'll have to be ready for it as it may be a difficult one," I thought, as I prepared my material for the interview. Instead, I found myself totally engrossed and captivated by a charismatic man and talented musician. With all my fallacious thinking discarded. the "interview" proceeded harmoniously with Frank in complete control.

Frank Zappa knows what he expects from his music and his musicians and how to achieve his expectations. Yet, he is an artist who is fully aware of the practical side of music with all its perils and knows how to survive in the real world of music

Frank touches on all of these areas during the conversation. Since his music is of prime importance to him, Frank Zappa wanted to begin by stating what he considers the most important part of music.

Zappa: I'm interested in melodies and it's the one thing I find lacking in most of the music today. The construction of melody is a specialized art form. I know a lot of people who can write and arrange but don't pay too much attention to where the melody is. It's a big challenge to write a melody. That's why people who can improvise well against chord changes are so unique because that's a challenge met instantaneously. When all you're presented with is the harmonics skeleton, your challenge is to create a personalized melody against that set of chord changes, it's a very impressive feat.

There's only one person in the group who doesn't really improvise and that's Ruth. That's because she has a mental block against it. I think she's capable of it but she just won't take a solo. Everybody else in the group is improvisationally oriented.

db: What about the bands educational backgrounds?

ZAPPA: Ian has a couple of degrees-a bachelor's and an MA in music. I think everybody in the group has a degree except me. They are all thoroughly trained, schooled musicians with either jazz or rock backgrounds. Ruth has more of a classical background. She's a Juilliard product.

I'm mostly self-taught. I had one semester of junior college. It's the highest rank I achieved in school. During that one semester I had a harmony course and the rest or the time I went to the library and listened to records. Played in bars.

db: It's almost a phenomena.

ZAPPA: A long time ago they didn't have schools and without schools they managed to produce the main body of what is called classical music. So, why should we be so brazen as to presume that the more and better schools you have the more and better music you

will have. I think a school is practical to provide instructors for the manipulation of instruments. But when a school announces that it doesn't approve of live performance, because it interferes with your studies, I think it's making a big mistake and most schools take that attitude. They expect you to take an academic approach to music and I don't think that's good. I think schools tend to turn out a lot of people who are very poorly suited to earn a living in the music business and that's doing a disservice to the students in not schooling them. I think it ought to be changed.

School is for getting chops. Part of your chops should be some survival tactics for the music business and they just don't give you that. They don't give you any concept of how to read a contract and the better you are when you get out the more susceptible you might be to getting reamed on some kind of a deal, spending the better part of your life in legal bondage.

All your creative energies might still be there but you wind up applying them to the betterment or somebody else's pocketbook. You might have to go out getting a part-time job in order to live under your contract. I know one guy who I thought was a very creative writer and got hooked with a manager who signed him to a seven-year contract and the guy was just stealing him blind. When he tried to get out of the contract the manager said: "If you don't work for me you won't be able to work at all for the duration of your contract. He just fucked him all up for seven years. So, there are people like that and unless you get some kind of knowledge of what to expect when you get out of school to try to earn your living as a musician or writer, the school has done you a disservice by not preparing you for the real world.

It doesn't make a shit how much musicology you hear in school or what they teach you about the things of the past, unless they teach you about the things of the present you are unprepared to survive. So, you wind up in a situation in the US., where there may be a large number of composers looking around with real great things to say who will never have a chance to have their music played because they have to take a part-time job in a gas station to afford the luxury or writing music. Then once they have written it, they have to go around begging an orchestra someplace to play it. In a way, that's how I got into the rock 'n' roll business. I hadn't even tried to write a rock 'n' roll thing until I was 21 years old. All the rest or the music that I had been writing, from the time I was 14 until that time, had nothing to do with rock, jazz or anything else. I was writing strictly chamber or orchestra music and I could never get any of it played. So, I figured the only way I was going to get it played was to put my own band together and write for that band. Then, I found out it was not easy to find people who could read what I was writing and so I wound up doing things that were not exactly complicated but at least it was mine and got to hear the idea I had dreamed up.

db: Is that early Mothers?

ZAPPA: Yeah. I had a group together for just about a year before we finally got a regular contract. Our manager shopped us all over the place and nobody was interested in our group because they thought we weren't commercial. Finally, a guy from MGM, named Tom Wilson, came to see us at the Whisky A Go Go in Los Angeles and saw one song which happened to be a blues and thought he had a white blues group on his hands. He signed us up for the grand total of $2,500.00, split evenly among the members of the Rock 'N' Roll Teenage combo. I think it was a three year contract with a couple of years off-something like that-and then when we finally got into the studio and recorded Brain Damage and all

those other weird tunes the eyebrows got higher and higher, and the phone calls from L.A. to N.Y. began but it was too late.

The very first group of Mothers consisted of an ex-carpenter, an ex-employee of the Electric Co., in Texas-Kansas, and a guy who had just recently stopped driving a lumber truck, and me who had just recently stopped being a commercial artist in the greeting card design business. Anyway, the first bunch of Mothers could not read and they didn't have any concept or time signatures above and beyond 4/4, and 3/4 was sometimes difficult but we managed to squeeze in a couple or bars of 6/4 here and there and as time went along they started getting into 5/8 and 7/8 but it was all by ear. They didn't have any concept of what was going on in contemporary music. They'd never heard of Stravinsky; they liked rock 'n' roll. So, it was very difficult to teach them how to play the things I wanted to have played. The crudest example is: it took two weeks to teach Jimmy Carl Black how to play the drum break at the end of the phrase in Anyway the Wind Blows and the beat was this; (demonstrates vocally)-a 6 bar on a 6 beat fill. It took two weeks for him to figure out all he had to do was to add two more beats in there and it'd come out right. First or all, he couldn't understand why anybody would want to add two more beats in the middle of a song that was in 4/4. That was too weird. After two weeks or drilling, and I mean 4 to 5 hours a day on that one lick, he got it. Then he could play the heck out or it.

db: He had it down.

ZAPPA: Yeah. he had it down. Now, that's the same way we learned how to do all the rest or the stuff-just by grinding it out. That's one of the reasons why some people used to think of me as a tyrannical director just flogging people to death to get them to do all these things, but there was no other way to do it. You just have to keep going over and over the same thing until you get some semblance of (I wouldn't say perfection) but at least get the thing to where it comes off. As each successive group of Mothers came along the quality of musicianship kept going up and up until about 1968 or 1969 by the time the group broke up, it was a 10-piece group and there were four people in it who could actually read music.

db: Horn players?

ZAPPA: Well, let's see, there was Ian Underwood, Bunk Gardner, Buzz Gardner his brother on trumpet, and Art Tripp who was our other drummer. He is very well-schooled professionally. They could all read well. But, that's four out of ten. I don't read very well myself I can write fast, but I can't read worth a shit. So, that still wasn't getting near anything what I needed to melt any elaborate musical textures of a written nature. We could play all kinds of weirdness spontaneously but in order to play a score of something we just couldn't do it by that time, so it was very disappointing. And, also, the fact in that year of '69 when I broke up the group, we had sort of been beating our head against the wall to develop something that was very unusual within the framework of pop music and nobody was interested in it. We were making very little money and we had a reputation that was sort of infamous rather than famous. So, when I put another group together I just went in a completely different direction. The basic thrust of the first group of Mothers around '69 was instrumental-70% of the show was instruments. There were a few vocals thrown in for amusement sake. I put the next bunch together who did mostly vocals and stage antics, stuff like that and wasn't nearly as complex to follow. That group gained much larger acceptability. The group was disbanded at the point where I had that accident in England. Now this group has all the best aspects of the weirdness of the early Mothers because they can improvise spontaneous textures but they all read very well, except for me and the bass player had a little bit of trouble. We're doing vocals, too.

db: Since doing "200 Motels", have you thought about doing more film work?

ZAPPA: I'll probably do another one at the end of the year.

db: Why did you choose video over film?

ZAPPA: There's just a different look to video than film. It has a different lens and a different depth. The depth of focus you get in video is far and away different from what you get in normal film lens. It's terrifying how you can flatten out a scene. in "200 Motels," when the guy is walking down the street toward the camera, toward the concentration camp, he's in perfect focus and the whole length of the street is in perfect focus. It's in perfect focus all the way back. It's pretty hard to achieve that with your normal film stuff because of the amount of lights you would have to use. We did it with a very reasonable amount of lights. All flat white lighting over the top. There's no colored gels.

db: Did you use instant replay?

ZAPPA: We didn't play anything back instantly. It took too much time. When you have 200 people on a crew being paid at an exorbitant rate, you're not going to stop and play your thing back. You'll wait until the end of the day. We shot for seven days and we only had two hour-and-a-half playbacks in all that time. We didn't have the budget to squander to have the crew and all sitting around while we rolled it back and looked at it. You could feel it while it's being shot, unless you're a dummy. You can feel from what you saw on the screen whether or not you want to go back and do a retake.

db: Did you have previous knowledge of video?

ZAPPA: I got my complete video education while working on the film. I knew some basic things before I started doing it but by the time I finished the video editing of the thing I was running the equipment myself. Don't tell the union, I was doing it because I've had plenty of experience with tape editing and I just looked at the tape and saw it was the same size as 8-track tape so why should it scare me. (laughs.)

db: Will your next film be done in video?

ZAPPA: I'm not sure. It's a science fiction thing and I'm not sure whether it's the right medium for it. It's not economical to do it in video unless you're going to do the whole thing and have it on a real tight schedule. Video pays off if everybody who is doing a scene has the scene rehearsed as in a stage play. You gain speed by having everybody know what they are doing, setting up four cameras around it and shooting a whole scene in continuity several times.

db: Did you have any previous business to prepare you for the business aspect of music?

ZAPPA: I'll tell you. Basically, the only thing I knew, from about the time I was 18 years old, was that I learned it's not safe to trust anybody. So, once I learned that, everything was okay. Instead of relegating 100% of the business that's done on my behalf to somebody else, I like to oversee it as much as I can without having it interfere with the creative work I do. Because I don't enjoy sitting in an office, talking on the phone, and reading contracts and all the rest of that stuff. But, if I don't pay some attention to it, I'll wind up getting in predicaments.

db: Has that happened?

ZAPPA: You know, even with the best intentions in the world, you hire somebody as a manager or doing PR for you or something like that, they can misrepresent you just on things based on their taste versus yours. When it comes time to make a fast decision, if you aren't around to say: "Well. I feel this way about it." They make the decision and then you wind up getting stuck with it. So, I try and involve myself as much as possible in those things. The things I stay away from are the booking of the tours, and the sort of grubby, practical things on that level. After the tour has been packaged and so forth. I'II look at it and see if there is anything disastrous implied in it and complain about that. But, usually I just let that all take place sort of on a mechanical basis.

db: Your horn section uses the Barcus-Berry Pickups. Right? What's the difference between that and playing through a microphone.

ZAPPA: More presence. You get higher gain with no interference from the other instruments on stage. You have an open microphone on stage and it's going to hear cymbals. Period. It'II hear, like, here's the microphone and if there's something right in front of it, you'll hear about 80% of it. But, when that instrument is not playing, it's going to be picking up 30% of the distant cymbals and drums and that's not a nice sound to reamplify. But with the thing going through the wires, it's like 90% pure instrument. We've experimented around. I had a group not too long ago which had mostly brass in it and it was all miked, that didn't work. So for us Barcus-Berry is the answer.

db: When did you decide to do your own label?

ZAPPA: The minute I found out the record company was cheating and stealing from us on our record royalties. It was approximately 1968 when we had enough evidence to substantiate that. We caught them in a weird legal position and got our contract back and negotiated a deal with Warner Bros. to distribute our product.

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http://www.geocities.com/zerttrez/phase2/74coq.htm

Dialogue: Frank Zappa - COQ

February 1974

After a brief bout with death when he was pushed off a London stage during a tumultuous encore by the Mothers of Invention, Mother of Mothers Frank Zappa, purveyor of classical rock and dirty blues filtered through smudged crystal spectacles, is at it again. Two or three new albums are in the can, several new films are in the offing, and Zappa's latest band is on tour.

Francis Vincent Zappa, Jr., was born of Sicilian-Greek parents 33 years ago. He was the weirdo on the block, the freaked-out genius who dabbled with test tubes and chemistry sets and grew up with dada-wheel drive. His avant-garde sensibility comprises cultural artifacts that range from music of Varese, Stravinsky, and the Coasters to realized figments of the imagination such as the Fillmore East, Suzy Creamcheese, and a number of memorable motels (200 to be exact). Zappa's vision has caused groupies to grope, musicologists to mortify, and stoned-out audiences to stare, stupe fied. After releasing 16 albums, directing onefilm, and letting several million dollars slip through his musically dextrous fingers, Zappa finally admits that he's not in it "only for the money " or for the music and the fame or even the "cheesy sex." Like his fans, Zappa says he's "curious."

COQ began this interview, which was conducted in Los Angeles, by asking about the accident that nearly stilled permanently one of the most irreverent, energetic, and essential creative voices in pop music history.

COQ: Somebody pulled you off the stage in England recently because his girlfriend was getting hot for you. Weren't you almost killed?

Zappa: I don't know what happened. I never saw the guy, I never saw the girl. I don't know anything about it. I just knew I was in the orchestra pit. My leg was broken. My ribs were broken. I had a hole in the back of my head. my neck was almost broken. My chin was caved in. They thought I was dead when they saw me down there. because my head was completely bent over on the side of my shoulder.

COQ: And now you look perfect. What effect did it have on you? Did you flash for a second that your last note had been played?

Zappa: No, I just woke up and I didn't know where I was. I didn't even know that I was on the road.

COQ: Can you describe your latest album?

Zappa: The new album is called Overnight Sensation and it's got quite a bit of interesting stuff on it. It's all vocal as opposed to what we have been releasing for the past few albums, and I'm doing most of the vocals. It's interesting.

COQ: Is Frank Zappa music still freaked out?

Zappa: How can you go back? Some of the titles are Zombie Woof a song about a guy who takes a nap and wakes up and finds out that he's someplace other than what he thought he was. He winds up raiding a dormitory, hitching up a nude maiden, and doing it to her on the roof. Then there's Camirillo Brillo, which is a song about a girl with a certain kind of frizv hairdo that is popular among teen maidens who practice witchcraft in their spare time. There is a song called Fifty Fifty, which has extremely absurd solos in it, one of which is a raging solo on a pipe organ. The LP certainly has a lot of good stuff in it. I think

it will be the most popular album since We're Only in It for the Money because it has a lot of very funny lyrics in it. All the musical performances are good, and the cover is unbelievable. It's a still life that was painted by a guy named Dave McMacken. It's a surrealistic scene that takes place in a motel room and has all these weird souvenirs from various tours that we have done.
COQ: Your film 200 .Hotels was your view of life on those tours. How did that project get started?
Zappa: I've been writing music in hotel rooms for years and years. I wanted to find some way of getting it played. It was more of a musical diary. So I devised a screenplay that chronicled in an abstract way the activities of the group on the road for a certain period of time and used the music that had been written in the motels as the scoring for the film.
COQ: Do you think that the music and the movie reflected what you had in your head?
Zappa: The film was shot in seven days. That is to say exactly S6 hours, seven eight-hour days of shooting. We used four video cameras and video tape and then eventually transferred to 35mm film. When the 56th hour rolled around, we had only shot one third of the script. I had to restructure the material that had been done because we weren't shooting in sequence. I had to sequence that information into another kind of plot that would at least carry some continuity. The cost of the film was $679,000. If I had had double that, I would have been able to shoot the whole script and had a better realization of what the thing was supposed to be.
COQ: It lost money.
Zappa: No. it didn't. It did not lose money.
COQ: A lot of people came out of the theaters scratching their heads.
Zappa: Well, they come out of concerts the same way, but at least I've given them the chance to go in and see something that will allow them to scratch their heads instead of letting them sit in front of a television set and scratch their balls and know in advance what everybody is going to say and what everybody is going to do.
COQ: Your work in films came as no surprise, because one or two of your projects were scrapped before completion. On top of that, Zappa music has always been highly theatrical in concept. As a matter of fact, you wrote one of the first rock operas, I Was a Teenage Malt Shop. How biographical was it?
Zappa: Malt Shop? Oh, strictly fantasy-type stuff. It was about an old man who has a daughter named Nelda, a cheerleader. The old man has a recording studio that hasn't had a hit, and there's an evil landlord who's going to foreclose on him. So there's this group that comes in with a high school hero called Med the Mungler who's a teenage Lone Ranger.
COQ: Were you arrested for dabbling in pornographic filmmaking?
Zappa: Oh, yeah, I was set up by the vice squad with a small intriguing plot where they sent a guy into my studio disguised as a used-car salesman who was requesting material to present to other used-car salesmen at an alleged party that was supposed to take place the following Wednesday. They came to me because my studio received a lot of publicity in the Cucamonga area and I was attempting to raise money to produce a science-fiction film called Captain Beefhart vs. the Grunt People. They had a whole big spread on the studio in the Sunday papers. The place itself had no windows and it was directly across the street from a holy roller church and a block away from a grammar school in a town of 7000 population. I was the only guy in town who had long hair. It was weird. So there was a curiosity in the community about what I was doing. They came to investigate me and performed what is known in the trade as an "illegal entrapment." The guy requested that pornographic material be manufactured. He specified what he wanted, and I didn't make him a film, I made him a sound tape because I had no idea that making it would be doing anything illegal. I thought I was doing a public service for a bunch of used-car salesmen who wanted to get their rocks off. So I made this tape for $100. It sounded really fine to me

at the time because E wasn't eating. He came back the next day and offered me $50 and I said, "Wait a minute. There is something strange here." He whipped out a badge and all these guys came in with cameras and this whole big thing. I didn't have any money to take it to court and I couldn't have fought the case. So I pleaded nolo contendere, which means: "I give up, I don't have any money, I can't afford a laywer, but I do not say I'm guilty." There was a 27-year-old district attorney who just did not like me and insisted that I be sentenced to six months in jail. The judge said, "No, we'll give him six months with all but ten days suspended and three years probation." So I went to the San Bernardino jail for ten days, tank C.
COQ: No film was ever shot?
Zappa: No film, and anyway the tape that was made was no worse than side four of the Freak Out album. So that's what's so hilarious 59 about it. This was '64 and the Freak Out album was '65.
COQ: In November 1966 you moved to New York and took up residency at the Garrick Theater. The New York Fugs were around the block at the Players Theater. It must have been a hairy scene back then.
Zappa: It was quite amusing in those days. Our show ran longer than theirs, I think. We just kept on going. I have films of a lot of the activities that went on there.
COQ: It was a milestone in your career.
Zappa: It was a milestone in musical history. No other group has ever done that -- had that long a residency and the amount of work that we did per day and each one different and tailor made for the audiences that came in there.
COQ: You performed marriages onstage, goosed young virgins, and spat at your audience. What was going on?
Zappa: That's what the audience liked. There was one kid in there who came back 20 or 30 times. His idea of a good time was to grab the microphone away from me, scream in it at the top of his lungs, hurl himself to the floor, collapse still screaming, and have me spit Coca-Cola all over him. Every time I would see him in the audience I would say, come on. He would run up and scream, I'd spit Coca-Cola. and he loved it. I mean, that's an art statement, isn't it?
COQ: What about the Marine atrocities?
Zappa: A Marine had been stabbed in Greenwich Village and there was a rumor going around that all the Marines were going to come into the Village and stomp all the hippies in sight. We were rehearsing one after noon and three Marines in uniform came in and sat down. I said hi to them and told them that they coul stay and watch a rehearsal, and they did. So when it was over, I went down and talked with them. The rest of the guys in the band were going, O man! are they coming down here to get us? They turned out to be real nice guys. and they asked for autographs. I asked if they would like to sit in with us that night. They said sure. I asked if they could sing. They said yes, House of the Rising Sun an Everybody Must Get Stoned were the two songs that they knew. So I to them to go across the street to the T Angel and get drunk and then come back and sit in with us. They can back and got up onstage in full-dress uniform. So the United States Marines started singing Everybody Must Get Stoned and House of the Rising Sun, and everybody loved it. So asked them if they would be interested in demonstrating some of their combat techniques onstage. They thought that would be fun. I send someone around the corner to my apartment to procure a large doll tha was about four and a half feet tall. When the Marines came back on stage for the second show I handed them the doll and told them to pretend that it was a gook baby and do whatever you do to people in Vietnam. They tore the doll apart, completely wasted it, with musical accompaniment. And then when the finished doing it, I picked up the doll and I think I said, "Let's hear it for the United States Marines." I held up the dismembered doll. There we weird, quiet music. People were crying. It was pretty heavy. And then after that was over, everybody clapped and I

introduced the guys to let them take a bow. The first guy walked up to the microphone and said, "Eat the apple, fuck the core," and the second guy said, "Eat the apple, fuck the core." and the third guy said, "Eat the apple, fuck the core, some of love our mothers more." I saw one of those guys again when we played Philadelphia. He was out of uniform by then.
COQ: You have an incredible reputation for doing what most artists would never do to their audience. You criticize them outright, blatantly put them down. Isn't that biting the hand that feeds you?
Zappa: No. If I'm in a concert situation and somebody in the audience is acting obnoxious and doing something that is disturbing the program, I'm not going to sit there and smile at him. I'm going to deal with him, so that the other people who came to watch the show can get their money's worth. That problem arises especially with East Coast audiences.
COQ: You used the word "obnoxious." A lot of people think that sometimes you actually fit that category.
Zappa: Well, a lot of people could say the same thing about Lawrence Welk, or they could say the same thing about any other music that they didn't like, you know. But we do enjoy it, and the people who have negative opinions about it can use any adjective they want to describe it.
COQ: Gracie Slick of the Jefferson Airplane once called you the most intelligent asshole she's ever met. What do you think she meant by that?
Zappa: I don't know. Would you presume that "asshole" has a negative connotation? Maybe she likes assholes. Hitler was an asshole. He just had a good p.r. department. Also a good tailor.
COQ: A lot of critics admit that you are a pretty neat musician, but there are a couple of blue meanies out there who accuse you of stealing certain classical composers' music. They claim you are a good arranger but not a great composer. Would you like to set the books straight on that?
Zappa: I have nothing to say to those people. They are deaf.
COQ: One of the more fascinating, and least-known, documents of groupie life was the album Permanent Damage by the GTOs. Who were they and how did you come to record them?
Zappa: The GTOs were a group of girls who used to hang out at my house. They had an interesting lifestyle. They used to write poetry and do little skits and live sort of a fantasy life. I thought it would be interesting to share their experiences with people who had never come in contact with anything like that. So I encouraged them to set music to their songs or get somebody to help them put their poems to music and I would record them. It was just a sampling of their lifestyle.
COQ: Another woman of infamy in your world was Suzy Creamcheese. What's her storv?
*Zappa:*Suzy Creamcheese was a girl named Jeanme Vassoir. And she is the voice that s on the Freak Out album. The mvth of Suzy Creamcheese, the letter on the album, I wrote myself. There never really was a Suzy Creamcheese. It was just a figment of my imagination until people started identifying with it heavily. It got to weird proportions in Europe, so that in 1967. when we did our first tour of Europe. people were asking if Suzie Creamcheese was along with us. So I procured the services of another girl named Pamela Zarubica, who was hired to be the Suzy Cream cheese of the European tour. And then she maintained the reputation of being Suzy Creamcheese after 1967. The first one went someplace, we don't know where. She's back in town now; I saw her.
COQ: What was the origin of the name Suzy Creamcheese? Is there a sexual connotation?
Zappa: I think it came from a dream.
COQ: A wet one?
Zappa: No, it wasn't even a cheesy one.

COQ: In 1969. vou issued the famed Mothers of Invention obituary letter. Was it just financial strain that led to the end of the group or was it a lack of understanding of your music by the audience?
Zappa: Oh, it was a lot more things, too. But I didn-t think that those things were of interest to the people who were to receive the letter. So for nine months there were no more Mothers.
COQ: At that point you said you had had enough. Was that enough of the other fellas or of the Mothers' identity?
Zappa: There were economic problems, and there was also the fact that many members of the group at that point ceased to perform to the best of their ability.
COQ: Were you upset at the public for not understanding your music?
Zappa: You know, just everything seemed to be going wrong at that particular time. I didn't think I wanted to continue beating my head against the wall under those circumstances.
COQ: Do audiences understand now?
Zappa: I don't know whether they understand. Some people like it, some people don't. I don't even know whether the ones who like it understand it. I'm sure the ones who don't like it don't understand it.
COQ: Do you think anyone could possibly understand?
Zappa: Sure.
COQ: Besidesyourself?
Zappa: Sure. I mean, there are a few I've run into. I know it's quite amazing.
COQ: Upon coming out of "retirement." you did a concert with Zubin Mehta and the L. A. Philharmonic. How did that turn out?
Zappa: I think it was successful from a number of standpoints and then a musical flop in some ways. It is virtually impossible to make any kind of music in a basketball arena, and if you're trying to stick a symphony orchestra in a basketball arena that holds 14.000 people and put an electric band alongside of it, any mixer in the world is going to have trouble trying to make it sound like it should. So we just had to struggle with those problems. It drew about 14,000 people: there was a big audience that wanted to see the event. There was no place available that had that seating capacity and better acoustics. That was just the only place we could have don.e it.
COQ: Right after that some of the Mothers and some of the Turtles joined forces. What new musical concepts did you get into with that group?
Zappa: They were very strong on the vaudeville. It was more rustic bumpkin. If they did choreography or anything onstage it wasn't controlled. It was spur of the moment random weirdness. It was OK for working in a 300-seat theater. but little actions with dolls and things like that are invisible when vou start working 4000 or 3000- seat auditoriums. You just can't get it across. So you need larger gestures, and Mark and Howard of the Turtles were good at large gestures.
COQ: Who is in vour group now?
Zappa: Ian Underwood from the Garrick Theater. Ruth Underwood on marimba and percussion. George Duke on piano. Jean-Luc Ponty on violin. Ralph Humphrey on drums, Bruce Fowler on trombone. Tom Fowler on bass. and we're trying out a harmonica player named Craig Stewart.
COQ: Do they understand?
Zappa: No, I wouldn't say that they understand. Thes are extremely skilled musicians and most of them fall into the virtuoso categorv and all have complete instrumental control.
COQ: Do you think that your music is communicating?
Zappa: Sure, but that doesn't mean that I'm communicating 100 percent.
COQ: What do you think has to be done so that musical barriers can be crossed?
Zappa: There is no way to know.
COQ: Are you still knocking your head against the wall?

Zappa: No. I just stopped getting agitated about it; it doesn't bother me.
COQ: Isn't that frustrating?
Zappa: Only if you let it be.
COQ: Why do you think people keep coming back?
Zappa: Curiosity, that's what the audience is into. They are there to be entertained and they sometimes go to see things because they are curious.
COQ: Is it a freak show to them?
Zappa: To some, yeah. I just do what I do. and I'll take my chances as to who gets off on it.

Patrick William Salvo

Transcribed 1994 By evilbob@music-planet.com

Jerry Kay Interviews Frank Zappa - 1978

This is the transcription of a recorded interview with Frank Zappa (**Z:**) conducted sometime in 1978 by Jerry Kay (**Q:**). This interview was sent to me on tape by my Deutsche Friend, Georg Deppe (whom I humbly thank for the pleasure thereof, and look forward to further correspondence).

Z: Ladies and gentlemen, this is Frank Zappa. I finally managed to find this radio station, yes.... this is quite an experience here trying to open a bottle of beer - it's one of those imported kind with tinfoil that's covering the top. And the guy here has asked me how I like that record and since the microphone wasn't on you probably missed the fact that I am DEEPLY impressed by any song that fades out with the words: "Oooooh-la-LA-la." And I'm sure you are too, otherwise you wouldn't be listening to this radio station.

Q: Did you fade out a couple of songs with "Oooooh-la-LA-la"?

Z: I think everything has to fade out with "Oooooh-la-LA-la". If you're going to fade out, you have to fade out with those words because those are the magic words. There are three or four really important words that happen in rock and roll and other types of music that normal people like to listen to. "Oooooh-la-LA-la" considered as one hyphenated word, would be one of the important words, and the other thing that you definitely gotta watch out for are the three other important magic words that make radio stations go off the air. But we won't discuss them right now. Those are the most powerful words in America today, that's why we have such a wonderful place to live in. Now, I'm here to play an album for you and I'm rapping... well.. rapping is one of those words that you say when you go on rock and roll radio stations... I'm rapping a little bit at this point to prepare each and every one of you for the grand and glorious experience of getting your little cassette machines out BECAUSE I would like to have you tape-record this album off the air BECAUSE this album is not going to be available in the stores BECAUSE Warner Brothers is trying to RUIN MY DARN CAREER.

Q: Tell us what happened, as far as why this record is not being released and how come.

Z: Well, it's not very simple to explain but I'll make a stab at it, and I don't really believe that people want to listen to a bunch of legal crud on the radio, but it's kinda unavoidable. Warner Brothers does not have the rights to this material although it was delivered to them and they refused to pay me for the material. And so I claimed a breach of contract and set out to negotiate with some other record companies. In several instances, Warner Brothers interfered with those negotiations and spoiled the possibility of releasing this material elsewhere. The first place they did it was with EMI, and the second place they did it was with Mercury Phonogram, and Mercury Phonogram was enough into the deal where they had made test pressings - they were ready to press the album, the cover was printed and so on and so forth. What you're listening to now is actual test pressings of the album that Mercury Phonogram had prepared. At the last minute, Warner Brothers threatened them with legal proceedings and blah, blah, blah, and so they backed out of the deal. And the way it stands now, my future as a recording artist is dangling in midair pending court procedures, which in California for civil cases can take anywhere from 3 to 5 years just to

get a day in court and have your case heard. Since I don't think that anybody wants to wait 3 to 5 years to hear my wonderful music...
Q: Hear, hear.
Z: I have taken it upon myself to come down here and advise anybody interested in the stuff that I do to get a cassette machine, and tape this album - you can have it for free, just take it right off the radio. Y'know, don't buy it - TAPE IT.

Later: (presumably after the album has been played on the air).
Z: This has been Frank Zappa as temporary bogus disc jockey playing The Leather Album for you and now I'm gonna say goodbye. Thanks a lot for letting me come down here and do it.
Q: Thanks, it was an absolute joy.
Z: Well, I don't know about that, come on now. That's probably more of my music that has been played on the radio in one blast.... I mean that's gotta be the world's record. You probably lost all of your listeners, they're all seeking elsewhere for the safety pin through the cheek music.
Q: I think they want to hear side 9.
Z: They do? (laughs). Well, since there is no side 9, since Warner Brothers has seen to that, we're going to leave you with GOODBYE.
Q: Again, thank you very much. I hope you have enjoyed this, I know you have and, uh, ta-ta.

Little Band We Used To Play In - 1980

By Michael Davis
From **Keyboard Magazine**

Frank Zappa has had such a varied career over the past 15 years that it's been rough keeping up with him. He's worn the hats of guitarist, composer/arranger, vocalist, producer, bandleader, filmmaker, and record company president and he has written and released music in many styles, ranging from doo-wop-era rock and roll to various improvisational contexts to totally scored contemporary classical music, gaining himself a substantial following and a lot of respect in the process.

Of course Zappa hasn't been able to accomplish this all by himself; he's employed some heavyweight musicians along the way. In the keyboard category alone, four names come immediately to mind. Don Preston was an on-again, off-again member of Frank's Mothers Of Invention during the late '60s; since then he's been a busy sideman, working and recording with numerous rock and pop acts as well as assisting those well outside the mainstream, such as the Residents and Carla Bley. Ian Underwood doubled on keyboards and woodwinds with the Mothers for years before leaving to pursue his own career as a top-notch L.A. studio keyboardist and synthesizer programmer. George Duke is well known to Keyboard readers, but his current multi-stylistic success as a leader came after several years with Frank, taken in two shifts, not to mention stints with violinist Jean-Luc Ponty and saxophonist Cannonball Adderley, and a brief partnership with drummer Billy Cobham. And Eddie Jobson spent much of 1976 with Zappa, between his gig with Roxy Music and his current [1980] position as lead instrumentalist and composer with the popular rock trio U.K.

But more recently, Frank's keyboards have been manned by Peter Wolf and Tommy Mars, names that may be less familiar. Starting in 1977, they've toured with Zappa and recorded with him, contributing to the considerable success of Sheik Yerbouti and Joe's Garage, Acts I, II & III. They also appear in Frank's new movie, Baby Snakes, which is currently going through final edits and distribution negotiations.

Wolf came to this country from his native Vienna only a year before joining Zappa; he considers Weather Report's Joe Zawinul, who was also born and raised in Austria, a father figure of sorts. He was in various bands in Europe but felt connected with Zappa through a series of fortuitous circumstances and considers his years in the band as time well spent. "Amazing the audience every second is the name of the game," he told Keyboard late last year, "and Frank does it. The music is constantly changing; you can never get bored. You can say, 'I don't like this Bela Bartok section,' or 'This is too rocky,' or 'This is too jazzy,' or 'This is too strange,' but you can never say, 'I'm bored.' I love to have that element of constant change."

But this need for change is what took Wolf away from Zappa's group earlier this year. A band project with other ex-2appa sidemen including vocalist Napoleon Murphy Brock and drummer Chester Thompson fizzled, but Peter has been keeping himself busy just the same. His first post-Zappa album is called Tutti, and it's all Peter; he played all the keyboards, synthesizers, and drums on it. It's a wide-ranging, all-instrumental affair and moves through areas commonly called fusion and orchestral rock.

"I'd rather listen to Talking Heads than I would Jean-Luc Ponty or Chick Corea, so what does it all mean?" he asks rhetorically. "I understand that if you can play, you want to be an artist and you want to be respected. But what I want is to do my electric thing in away so that nobody has to prove anything anymore, just do nowadays music with all the balls ahead. The emotion of every player is the most important thing, what stands behind this chord or this tone. If you leave that out, the music does not touch you."

Tommy Mars (whose real name is Thomas Mariano, he wants us to know) would probably agree with Peter that the emotional context of the music is its most important component -- but, oddly enough for a man who claims to have developed a "tremendous rapport" with Zappa's E-mu, he feels that synthesizers are somewhat "dehumanizing." When quizzed about the music he writes on his own, he replies, "If I was going to do a solo album and wanted a violin to play, I wouldn't synthesize it. The way I look at it, no matter how well you synthesize a sound, big deal, it's only an electrical wave. It's not the real thing. I'd sooner hire somebody, waste myself bucks-wise, and get real people playing on the album. But I'm old-fashioned; what can I say?"

Since Tommy's on the road with Zappa right now, with possible recordings to follow, he may not have a whole lot of time to work on his own music. Bassist Arthur Barrow will be moving over to the keys from time to time to take up some of the slack left by the departed Wolf, but for the most part they're Mars's responsibility at the moment. [Ed. Note: Zappa's 1980 lineup consisted of Mars, Barrow, rhythm guitarists Ike Willis and Ray White, and drummer David Logeman.] Peter and Tommy were helpful and open, but to get the full story on the Zappa band, we had to talk to the man himself. So Keyboard tracked Frank down at his Laurel Canyon home and talked to him right next door to where workmen were hammering away, building his new recording studio.

Zappa proved to be extremely informative about his aesthetics, his equipment, and what he expects of his musicians, applying his acid wit to all areas of scrutiny. He does much of his writing at the piano but he doesn't consider himself a piano player by any stretch of the imagination.

"I'm a plunker," he admits. "I couldn't even imagine what it would be like to play the piano, it's such a foreign concept. I think of the piano as some sort of an elaborate percussion instrument. I'm very fond of percussion, but my favorite instrument is the guitar.

While avoiding a simple assessment of his latest keyboardists -- "I don't want this to turn out like a report card on Tommy and Peter", was the way he put it -- he did mention their relative strengths and weaknesses in regard to his music at several points in our conversation. He's since rehired Mars for his current road band, so Tommy must be meeting Frank's stringent standards at the moment, but the search for the ultimate keyboardist goes on.

"I think I'm probably gonna start auditioning again," he remarks, "because I haven't yet found a keyboard player who is 'roadable' and who can really read music. Tommy reads okay; Peter doesn't read that well at all. George reads pretty well. I'm talking about someone who can look at the most difficult stuff on a page and the notes come flying off; that means less time and trouble teaching the stuff to the rest of the band.

"Then he would have to be roadable. By that, I mean have the flexibility to go from playing simple backgrounds to really difficult written-out stuff, plus have the attitude so that he would enjoy touring. I haven't had too much luck finding someone who can do all those things because he probably doesn't exist. But maybe there's someone out there and I just haven't found him yet."

When you begin your next project will you be using the same musicians you've been using lately?

Some yes, some no. Some of the people I take on the road are not too efficient in the studio and vice-versa. Plus there are a few new people I want to try out.

Are you going to use Peter and Tommy again on keyboards if they're available?

That depends on what the project is. Peter did a lot of the work on Joe's Garage; Tommy just didn't seem to be suited for it. When we first went into the studio, Pete was back in Vienna and Tommy started the album off. He was always jamming around. We had so much trouble trying to make him behave like a studio musician and get down to business that when Peter came back from Vienna, I tried him for a couple of days and it was a lot more efficient. With Tommy, we worked for several days and wound up with two tracks, whereas with Peter, we could do two or three tracks a day. They're equipped differently. Tommy is definitely a creative keyboard player with a good musical mind, but in the discipline department we had some problems. He just can't control himself to sit down and play something simple that's required for a simple song. So Tommy plays on only two songs on all six sides of Joe's Garage; the rest of the keyboard work is Peter. For other things that I do, Tommy is probably better qualified than Peter. Tommy reads a lot better and has a totally different kind of musical ear. It just turned out that he wasn't what I needed for Joe's Garage. You see, there's very little keyboard work on it. What was needed was vocal accompaniment, because it's basically a vocal album. We needed some tracks laid down on a Wurlitzer electric piano, without any jazz motives or cadenzas. That's all I wanted. There are a lot of keyboard players in the world who cannot imagine that that would be fun to do. Tommy is one of'em. Peter wasn't all that thrilled about it either, because he's basically a jazz guy too, but in his case you can say, "Now, Peter, stop playing the jazz and just play this," and he'll do it. You have to tell Tommy 18 times. The first few sessions were very chaotic. I hate to have to act like an umpire or referee and go scream at everybody because they're jamming. I don't pay 200 dollars an hour studio time to have guys go in there and jazz out. If you want to practice, do it at home; don't do it in the studio. The studio is the time to make the record.

Could you tell us what keyboards you've used in your band recently?

I have a lot of synthesizers. I've got an Emu, a Yamaha CS-80, three Electrocomps, a Syn-Key, a string box, a Clavinet, a Pianet/Clavinet combination, a Yamaha electric grand, and two Wurlitzers. I've got a warehouse full of keyboards. A lot of my synthesizers are going to be mounted on a semi-permanent basis over in my studio. In the control room, there's going to be one master keyboard that's patchable out to the other synthesizers, so that instead of one big toot coming out, you play the keyboard and the individual voices can be played in the live echo chamber through eight speakers going through an air space with stereo microphones in the chamber. You can set it up for eight totally different sounds, and they'll be coming at you in an air space and will sound more like music instead of electronics.

Are you going to be getting any more instruments when your studio is finished?

Yeah, I'm gonna buy some more. I'm going to get a harpsichord and a celeste. I already have a Bosendorfer Imperial grand. I don't have a Rhodes right now, and I'm thinking about buying one. Plus maybe one more synthesizer. Other purchases for the studio include percussion.

Tommy was saying something about a modified organ you had.

Yeah, the B-3. I had it transistorized and put in a road case, and I put a voltage follower on it. I put the outputs on the Hammond so that you can run the Minimoog or any other modern synthesizer with it. I also had a special set of Syn-Drums so that you could get a scale of 61 bongos or 61 tom-toms or 61 woodblocks or whatever. The box is the guts of two Syn-Drum units with higher quality oscillators keyed to the voltage that's put out by the follower. So when you play a scale, you can get any of the Syn-Drum sounds along with the sound of the organ. You can fix it so that you have two separate Syn-Drum sounds tracking parallel to one keyboard, or you can have the lower keyboard with its notes plus one Syn-Drum.

You're not using it now?

No, we didn't take it on the last tour. It was too much of a temptation for Tommy to noodle on. It's got a lot of possibilities.

Any other modifications on your equipment?

I'm having modifications done on all my keyboards to bring them up to studio quality sound. This includes rebuilding the preamps in all of them and having the Rhodes done in stereo. I'11 probably have the stereo treatment done on the Clavinets and the Wurlitzers too.

Who does your work?

Claus Wiedmann and David Gray. But Claus decided to take a little vacation.

What type of amplification do your keyboard players have?

Each guy has a Tycobrahe cabinet with two 15s, a midrange horn, and a couple of tweeters powered by a 300-watt Crown amplifier, plus his own mixing board.

What about the miking?

There's no miking; it's all direct into the PA. Ours is called a Bonwelke and we use four stacks about 15 feet tall on a side. It uses BGW power amps. There are four-way crossovers, with compression built into each band of the crossover so we don't blow speakers. We use Yamaha boards that have about 50 or 60 inputs.

What kinds of effects lines do you use?

I usually tell 'em not to use any, because they're so damn noisy. The biggest problem with sound on the road is that when you're using large amplification, you also have large amplification of the noises within the instruments themselves. Everybody wants to stick a flanger or a Bi-phase or something on their instruments, and those effects are nice, but they're noisy. If the instrument is sitting there in idle, it's still putting out this crud into the system. Also, these things usually reduce the heaviness of the instrument, so if, say, you put a Rhodes through a Biphase you get this horrible clipping sound if the guy really wants to play it hard. If the guy is really banging on it, the voltage he's putting out is driving the box crazy. It makes distortion. Naturally, the keyboard player is enraptured with what he's doing, just wailing away, but the kids out in the audience are hearing this big crackle, this unmusical noise. It's irritating.

With as many guitars and keyboards as you've been using lately, any added distortion would really muddy up the sound.

I really prefer a clean sound, especially from the keyboards. The main thing that bothers me about keyboard players is from the time they learn to play synthesizer, the biggest thing they want to do is sound like a guitar. You've got these Minimoog players who think they finally sound like Jimi Hendrix. There's no way; it's not gonna happen. Basically, folks, let's face it: A synthesizer is not designed to make that kind of noise. It's a bleak little instrument. How can it have the wonderful tones and expressive capabilities of the electric guitar itself? These guys are spending bucks on bucks just trying to sound like an electric guitar. If they want to be a guitarist, why don't they get one and learn how to play it? It's a real timewaster for people to learn how to make guitar-like sounds that are so cliched. Who needs to hear it?

What do you mainly want, then from your keyboardists?

The thing I'm looking for out of a keyboard section is definition. They're playing single-line instruments that add a clean edge to the guitar sounds that might otherwise be fuzzy. That tends to make the ensemble sound a little more coherent. I don't need extra fuzz or extra flange or extra tweeze-edge. The other thing that is difficult to do when orchestrating for multiple keyboard setups is to convince the keyboard players that a simple part assigned to them is the thing that's gonna do the job and to have them play it that way every night. There's so much temptation to jazz out. Jazz-oriented keyboard artists are the worst thing to happen to orchestration; they just can't fathom it. In concert, especially with electric instruments, the sound is so thick that you don't need 12-note chords on the piano, much

less on two keyboard setups. You need single lines that are played cleanly that come out the right way, playing with the rest of what's going on.

To play your music, you need people who can really play well, and they all probably want to play a lot.

That's true in every form of music. Guitar players are the same way. It's hard to convince a guitar player that a few notes are going to get the job done better than a million notes. This is a problem I face as a composer and an orchestrator; musicians always look at it like anyone who tells them what to play is inhibiting their lifestyle. But unless there is organization, the music is always going to sound like a big jam session. Once the musicians learn the songs in rehearsal, once they learn the arrangements and we get out on the road, the songs sound good. But as soon as the lights go on and the audience claps a few times, everybody starts adding their own little things. By the end of a tour, a lot of things sound like chaos. This is one of the reasons why some people lose their jobs.

But at the same time, they have to play the music expressively.

Well, see, the music is based on contrasts, contrasts between things that are very simple and things that are very complicated. If everything is complicated all the time, there is no contrast. Not only that, there is no contact with the audience. They can't handle it. They don't want to be baffled by 32nd-notes ripping around them constantly for two hours in a hockey rink. That's no fun to listen to. If you want to sound like you're actually doing something, it has to be put in a setting where it can show up. That's why if a guy is playing solo on keyboards and wants to whiz around, the accompaniment that the band provides him is usually kept to bass and drums without everybody else chiming in, so that you can hear what the keyboard player is doing on his own. It just seems to work better acoustically in a hall to thin things out. Another struggle that concerns the acoustics of a hall is that oftentimes what you sound like onstage is not what you sound like out in the audience. The rigs that I provide for the keyboard players to monitor themselves with are really elaborate. Each guy can sound like a million bucks to himself, but they always crank the bass up so they can rattle their groin while they're doing it. This does not necessarily translate to the audience out front because they get so much bass happening up on stage that it muddies the sound up The mixer is always telling them to take some bass off, and this makes them unhappy that they can't give themselves a scrotal massage while they're playing. At the end of the show, you have these keyboard players walking around like you'd stabbed them in the heart because the mixer told them to lower the low end out of their setup or told them to play softer. This is the battle that goes on all the time, trying to get good keyboard sounds out of a P.A. Unless everybody modifies their sound to fit the hall, the music suffers, the show suffers, and the audience suffers because they don't get to hear what the intent was.

Q:When you have so many instruments, do your sound checks go on a long time?
FZ:Not necessarily, because if you have a good mixer he can do the necessary things at the sound check. The thing that holds them up is broken equipment, and when you have a lot of stuff there are a lot of possibilities for a busted wire or a ground loop. That's why, when we tour, there's an average of two roadies for every guy in the band. It's not that every guy has two little servants to look after his equipment, but counting all the facilities necessary to set up a show, the crew is twice as big as the band.
Q:Do you carry substitute keyboards in case of breakdown?
FZ:We don't carry any extras. If something breaks down, it gets fixed. We carry guys and the equipment to fix it.
Q:Did you ever work with two keyboard players before your current personnel?
FZ:Before the band that did Sheik Yerbouti? How about Don Preston and Ian Underwood? I've done two keyboards, two drums, a lot of variations. One of these days, I'11 probably try two percussionists if I can find two percussionists that can work together. That's a real

problem. Usually guitar players don't have problems playing in ensembles. You see bands with three guitarists and while there may be some competition there, they do ensemblize, playing harmony runs and stuff like that. But with keyboard players, it's cutthroat. It's cutthroat with drummers and percussionists too. They always love to show each other up.
Q:Why did you decide to go with two keyboard players at this time?
FZ:Because of the orchestrational possibilities. When George Duke was in the band, a second keyboard player would have been a waste of time, partly because of the type of stuff we were doing. George is so diverse; he can play just about any style, and he's got the discipline to play parts. He really understands how to comp; he's a really well rounded musician. But people like George don't grow on trees. Sometimes to replace the guy who is so diverse, you need two guys who can fit into each other's liabilities.
Q:What about the band you had with Eddie Jobson?
FZ:Well, there were a lot of problems having the band with Eddie, because his priorities were in peculiar locations. But I don't want to say anything bad about him.
Q:How much freedom do you give your synthesizer players in terms of patches?
FZ:They can do what they want to do on their solos, but as far as the orchestrated parts of the show go, they're all pre-decided in rehearsals.
Q:At the rehearsals, do you set the synthesizers up the way you want them?
FZ:I specify the sounds, but I don't personally go over and patch 'em. I say the E-mu will sound like a bright brass section and the Electrocomp will sound like French horns, and leave it that way.
Q:Then they come up with the patches to get the sound that you specify
FZ:Right. Then they set 'em up that way each day on the road.
Q:So you try to have all your patches set before you go onstage?
FZ:Well, with the E-mu, we just let it sit in one setting for the brass, and the CS-80 is all push-button. In the case of Sheik Yerbouti, we took the E-mu on the road and had it set up as what you call a dedicated system, where it was permanently set up to sound like a brass ensemble, a lot of trumpets and trombones. The Electrocomps were pretty much set up permanently to sound like French horns. That was the setup on "Yo' Mama" [from Sheik Yerbouti].
Q:Do you use the CS-80 for any brass sounds?
FZ:The CS-80 has a fair brass sound, but not nearly as good as the E-mu. The string sound on the CS-80 is real nice, though, especially if a guy has good hand control, because by the amount of pressure you apply to the keys, you can make some voices, say in a string quartet, have vibrate or make them softer. It's very expressive. If you've got good touch control, you can make it sound great. That's one thing that Tommy does very well. I came to a rehearsal one day and he was playing "The Eric Dolphy Memorial Barbecue" from Weasels Ripped My Flesh as a string quartet on the CS-80, and it sounded fabulous.
Q:Do you prefer to use synthesizers now instead of horn sections, or does it depend on the type of music involved?
FZ:It depends on the type of music. For instance, if you are playing a synthesizer that makes a brass ensemble sound and you take six fingers and make a six-note chord and it comes out in tune and loud enough to compete with electric guitars, then you are doing the right thing. For two reasons: One, it's easier to get a balance acoustically, and two, chords and things like that really tire out brass players over a long period of time. Just playing whole-notes is a real boring job for a brass player. It always sounds good, but they always hate to do it because horn players too like to play a million notes. There isn't a horn player alive that likes to play background harmony for a guitar player. They just don't like that, and ultimately they hate their lives; you take them on the road and no matter how much money you pay them, they don't like their lives because they're not out there noodling away. You begin to feel sorry for them, and that brings you down. You feel that you can't

play for too long because those guys on horns are going to go to sleep back there. So that's one of the best things about a brass-sounding synthesizer: You can get a brass-like sound in a live performance without breaking the hearts of a number of people who blow on things.
Q:Do you work out all your orchestrations on acoustic piano?
FZ:It depends what kind of stuff it is. Some of the complicated sections like the bridge in the wet T-shirt contest [from Joe's Garage] are all written out. The musicians get the music and they're supposed to go home and memorize it. Then when they get the notes under their hands, we figure out what sounds we're gonna use for it, then practice it till we get it up to speed. But other arrangements can be just a bass line, chords, and a lead. I'11 hum it to 'em and tell 'em the chords. It's all done with sketches because there's such a great resistance in rock and roll to reading music. It's always a forced situation. I can give them a piece of paper with the notes on it and they think that what they have in their minds is better than what I have on the paper. So I have to use the most stringently enforced discipline. There's always the constant reminder of the paycheck at the end of the week -- that they are getting paid to play these notes. Some guys are good about it and some guys are not. Two guys that have been in the band that aren't real fast sight-readers but can learn the parts and the parts are reliable are Arthur Barrow, the bass player, and Warren Cucurullo, our ex-rhythm guitarist.
Q:When synthesizers first started coming onto the market in the early '70s, did you think that they were going to be as influential as they've been?
FZ:I thought that they would definitely catch on, for sure. You know why? Because every keyboard player always wanted to sound like a guitar. And the day that somebody makes one that really sounds like a guitar, everybody'll buy it.
Q:Do you really think that has been the primary motivation?
FZ:Well, I think that keyboard players who are soloists thought, "At last, volume-wise, I can be competitive with the guitars in the band." But I think the idea that you could explore some new audio territory was a strong selling point for a lot of people. Unfortunately, when they got the instrument and didn't understand how to work it, you got some of the most boring sounds on record coming out of them, people doing the same ARP 2600 duck quack sound.
Q:Since they've come on the market, would you say there have been any significant improvements in the instruments themselves?
FZ:The major improvement has been the polyphonic improvement; that's a big one. But I think the digital stuff that is coming out is going to be even more of one.
Q:In what way?
FZ:Faster recall of settings that you know, settings that you make up yourself. Patching is okay for a studio -- it's even a little slow for the studio -- but in live performance you've got to change from one sound to another on the beat, and that doesn't go along with patch cords and making fine adjustments on your instrument with tiny knobs. You don't want to have your patch cords out and your microscope out to make sure that your low frequency oscillator is set at exactly the right rate so your vibrate won't sound too peculiar, not when you're trying to look cute to the teenage girl in the third row.

One Size Fits All

By Steve Rosen
From Guitar Player, Jan. 1977

Frank Zappa - guitarist, composer, producer, avid Roller Derby fan, and leader of The Mothers Of Invention - is at 36 probably the elder statesman of progressive rock and roll. Though most people first credit Zappa for his advanced, avant-garde songwriting, it takes his own exceptional and original guitar technique to put forth those ideas.
In addition to leading his ever-changing, ever-expanding Mothers - which has included such notables as French jazz violinist Jean-Luc Ponty, multi-keyboardist George Duke, drummer Aynsley Dunbar (now [1977] with Journey), and Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan (presently known as Flo and Eddie) -Zappa has continually served as one of the most articulate and controversial satirists on "pop music weirdness." Some of the Baltimore-born artist's side projects have included producing an album by Grand Funk Railroad, leading a Fifties rock revival put-on called Ruben & The Jets, and producing several films, such as 200 Motels.
Here then is the unexpurgated story of Frank Zappa - early influences, his guitar technique, his equipment changes through the years, and his approach to producing his own sound on record.

Q: When did you start playing guitar?
FZ: I began when I was 18, but I started on drums when I was 12.1 didn't hear any guitarists until I was about 15 or so, because in those days the saxophone was the instrument that was happening on record. when you heard a guitar player it was always a treat -so I went out collecting R&B guitar records. The solos were never long enough - they only gave them one chorus, and I figured the only way I was going to get to hear enough of what I wanted to hear was to get an instrument and play it myself. So I got one for a buck-fifty in an auction - an arch-top, f-hole, cracked base, unknown-brand thing, because the whole finish had been sanded off. It looked like it had been sandblasted. The strings were about, oh, a good inch off the fingerboard (*laughs*), and I didn't know any chords, but I started playing lines right away. Then I started figuring out chords and finally got a Mickey Baker book and learned a bunch of chords off that.
Q: Who were some of your early guitar influences?
FZ: I used to like Johnny Guitar Watson, Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, Guitar Slim (Eddie Jones), Matt Murphy.
Q: Were there bands playing in your town that you could go and see live?
FZ: Yeah, sure. In San Diego when I was in high school down there, they had plenty of rhythm and blues bands. Most of them played instrumentals, only a few had singers.
Q: Were your parents musical at all?
FZ: My father played guitar when he was in college. He had an old one sitting around the house, but it didn't feel as good to me as the one for a buck-fifty. He played it about once every three years; he'd pick it up and go *wank-wank-wank*, but that was about all.
Q: How long did you keep playing drums?
FZ: I still play a little bit now. I had a few lessons. I went to a summer school once when I was in Monterey, and they had, like, basic training for kids who were going to be in the drum and bugle corps back in school. I remember the teacher's name was Keith McKillip,

and he was the rudimental drummer of the area in Pacific Grove. And they had all these little kids about 11 or 12 years old lined up in this room. You didn't have drums, you had these boards - not pads, but a plank laid across some chairs - and everybody stood in front of this plank and went *rattlety-tat* on it. I didn't have an actual drum until I was 14 or 15, and all of my practicing had been done in my bedroom on the top of this bureau - which happened to be a nice piece of furniture at one time, but some perverted Italian had painted it green, and the top of it was all scabbed off from me beating it with the sticks. Finally my mother got me a drum and allowed me to practice out in the garage -just one snare drum. Then I entered my rock and roll career at 15 when I talked them into getting me a complete set, which was a kick drum, a rancid little hi-hat, a snare, one floor tom, and one 15" ride cymbal. The whole set cost 50 bucks. I played my first professional gig at a place called the Uptown Hall in San Diego, which was in the Hillcrest district at 40th and Mead. I remember it well, going to my first gig: I got over there, set up my drums, and noticed I had forgotten my only pair of sticks (*laughs*). And I lived way on the other side of town. I was really hurting for an instrument in those days. For band rehearsals we used this guy Stuart's house. His father was a preacher, and he didn't have any interest in having a drum set in the house, but they allowed me to beat on a pair of pots that I held between my legs. And I'm sitting there trying to play shuffles on these two pots between my legs!

Q: When did you buy your first electric guitar?

FZ: I didn't get my first one until I was 21, when I rented a Telecaster from a music store. Then I bought a Jazzmaster which I used for about a year and a half. I used to play, like, lounge jobs -you know, sit on the stool, strum four chords to a bar, "Anniversary Waltz," "Happy birthday," one twist number per night, don't turn it up. All that kind of crap. Nobody else in the band really knew what the chord changes were to these dumb songs; they were all trying to figure out what was going on. I played places like Tommy Sandy's Club Sahara in San Bernardino, some clubs around West Covina. Really boring, miserable places. I worked with a group called Joe Perrino and the Mellow Tones. Then I got a chance to write some music for a movie and actually earned something doing that. So with the money I got from the film job I bought a Gibson ES-S Switchmaster, which I used for about five years. I recorded the first three albums with that guitar.

Q: What movie was that?

FZ: It was called *Run Home Slow*. It was a western starring Mercedes McCambridge and was written by my high school English teacher. It's been on TV a few times. I've done music for four films. The first one was called *The World's Greatest Sinner*, starring Timothy Carey, about a guy who thinks he's God and then later on has doubts. Then Run Home Slow, and a short called *Burnt Weeny Sandwich*, *200 Motels.*

Q: Were you involved in any serious music before the Mothers Of Invention?

FZ: I had a three-piece power trio called the Mothers, with Les Papp on drums and Paul Woods on bass, and we were working at a place called The Saints & Sinners in Ontario, California. It was, like, mostly Mexican laborers, a go-go bar, lots of beer, and a few waitresses who would jump on the tables - that type of thing.

Q: Did you begin singing around the same time you started playing?

FZ: Well, I used to have to sing with that trio at the Mexican place. But that was mostly blues-type songs. I did a little bit of singing on and off on the first few albums, but I never thought that I could really sing. The problem was, with the lyrics I was writing, it was hard to find anybody else who felt comfortable singing those words. They would never get it across right. So I figured if I was ever going to get the intention of the lyrics out I'd better do it myself. I still have a horrible time singing and playing at the same time -just ridiculous. I can barely strum a chord and say one word over it; that's hard coordination for me. I'd never make it in country and western music.

Q: Besides the Switchmaster guitar, what equipment did you use on Freak Out?

FZ: Just a Fender Deluxe amp, that's all. After the Switchmaster I got a Les Paul gold-top and used that for a couple of albums. And eventually I got a Gibson SG.
Q: Are you still using an SG?
FZ: I'm using a variety of things now; I've branched out quite a bit in the last couple of years. I've got a couple of Strats wired up funny ways. Both of them have preamps built into them, and one has a special tone control switch which lets you put each of the pickups out of phase and that kind of stuff. The other Strat has a Barcus-Berry located in the neck, which gives it a really interesting sound, because I do a lot of stuff with my left hand, and it helps the notes speak a lot faster. It's like the whole guitar is allve; you can touch it anyplace and hear where you touch the guitar, because the Barcus-Berry hears all of it.
Q: What specifically do you do with your left hand?
FZ: If I pick one note with my right hand, I'm playing five with my left. I don't pick everything that I play, and consequently the action is kept down pretty close on most of the guitars. I also do some stuff where I use the pick on the fingerboard, pressing down and hitting the string at the same time. It gets kind of a Bulgarian bagpipe sound. An example of that is on the end of the solo in "Inca Roads" and also on "Po-Jama People" (both from *One Size FitsAll*).
Q: Are you still using the SG pictured on the cover of the "live" Roxy & Elsewhere album?
FZ: No, I have another SG that I'm using. The one that's on the Roxy cover has since been thoroughly injured by an alrline company, they beat the hell out of it. They cracked the neck, and the most recent time it came back from Europe the binding was off the fretboard. I had the neck repaired, but it's never been the same; it flexes so much that it's hard to keep in tune, so I hardly use it anymore. But one time we were working down in Phoenix, and this guy came to the dressing room after the show with this guitar he'd built and wanted to sell. He had copied a Gibson (SG) except he'd added one more fret so it went up to an E, and it had an ebony fingerboard, humbucking pickups, and some inlay, and some real nice woodwork on it. He wanted $500 for it, and I thought it was a real nice guitar, so I bought it. I had (guitar maker) Rex Bogue do some stuff to it, add a preamp and snazz it up, and that's the one I'm using now. Another one of my Strats is the one Hendrix burned at the Miami Pop Festival; it was given to me by this guy who used to be his roadie. I had it hanging on the wall in my basement for years until last year when I gave it to Rex and said, "Put this sucker back together," because it was all tore up. The neck was cracked off, the bodywas all fired, and the pickups were blistered and bubbled. That's the one that's got the Barcus-Berry in the neck. A lot of people thought I had Hendrix's guitar from Monterey, but it was from Miami; the one at Monterey was white and this one is sunburst.
Q: Do you use the vibrato arm on the Stratocaster or the SG?
FZ: Well, I used to use it on the SG a little bit, but I took it off because it was too hard to keep the instrument in tune, specifically the one with the soft neck. But I use the vibrato arm quite a bit now on one of the Strats. I don't even have a vibrato arm on the Hendrix Strat. You can hear it on *ZootAllures*.
Q: What type of wah-wah do you use?
FZ: I have a Mu-tron and the Oberheim VCF (voltage control filter). I've got an example of that on this new album (*ZootAllures*). I'm starting to use some Echoplex now, which I've generally avoided in the past.
Q: You use the wah-wah a lot in its bass position where it acts as a sort of fuzz boost.
FZ: Yeah, I use it for a tone control. Very seldom do I just step on it on the beat like on the old Clapton records where he goes wacka-wackawacka, just to tap your foot on it. Usually what I do is shape the notes for phrasing with it, and the motion of the pedal itself is very slight. I try to find one center notch in the thing that's going to emphasize certain harmonics, and ride it right in that area. Because if you put it all the way to the top it's too squeaky, and if you put it all the way back it's too blurred.

Q: Had you heard Clapton or Hendrix using the wah-wah before you started?
FZ: As a matter of fact, I think I was one of the first people to use the wah-wah pedal. I'd never even heard of Jimi Hendrix at the time I bought mine; I didn't even know who he was. I had used wah-wah on the Clavinet, guitar, and saxophone when we were doing *We're Only in It For The Money*, and that was just before I met Hendrix. He came over and sat in with us at the Garrick Theater that night and was using all the stuff we had onstage. Seems like every time I went to Manny's there'd be some new gizmo that we'd try out, so we were always into the hardware of the rock and roll industry.
Q: How did Eric Clapton come to appear on We're Only in It for the Money?
FZ: I met him someplace in New York; I can't remember where, maybe at one of our concerts. He played with the Mothers once at the Shrine in Los Angeles and came over to my house, but I haven't been on speaking terms with him for some time now. He was just in New York one day hanging out, so I invited him over to the studio to do the rap that's on *We're Only In It For The Money*. People think he's playing on it, but he's not; the only thing he's doing on there is talking.
Q: Did the two of you ever sit down and trade ideas on guitar?
FZ: No, he wasn't that kind of musician as far as I could tell; he wasn't the jamming type. When I used to live in a log cabin I had some amps set up in my basement, and he came over one day and played during one of our rehearsals. But he didn't like the amp; we were using Acoustics then, and he didn't like them. And remember when he came onstage at the Shrine? Nobody knew who he was. He came out and played the set, and nobody paid any attention to him at all, until he walked off, and I told the audience that was Eric Clapton.
Q: What is an "0ctave bass" (used on Hot Rats)?
FZ: It's a bass that's been speeded up an octave to put it up into guitar range. Speeding it up not only changes the rate that you play the notes, but it changes the envelope of the notes and gives a punchier attack. And you know how a bass will ring for a long time? It gives you a different kind of sustain; the sustain comes out an octave higher.
Q: Are there any devices which you've developed for the guitar?
FZ: There's one thing a guy named Bob Easton constructed for me called the Electro Wagnerian Emancipator. It's avery attractive little device that combines a frequency follower with a device that puts out harmony notes to what you're playing. You can have your choice of any 12 chromatic notes in four parts following your runs. You can't play chords with it, but linearly it'll follow you whether you bend or whatever. Its main drawback is that the tone that comes out of it is somewhat like a Farfisa organ.
Q: What kind of picks and strings do you use?
FZ: I use Fender Heavy picks, and I use a different set of strings for each guitar, and I have about 22 guitars. To give you an idea, I use either an .008 or .009 on top [E], an .011 or .012 on the *B*, a .016 or .017 on the *G,* a .024 on the *D*, anywhere from a.032 to a .038 on the *A*, and anywhere from a .046 to a .052 on the low *E*. So it's medium on the bottom strings, and they're mainly all Ernie Balls.
Q: What is your amp setup?
FZ: I have a Vox cabinet with four JBLs in it (12" each) and another Marshall cabinet with JBLs. I use a 100-watt Marshall and an Acoustic 270, but I'm going to redo all that stuff for the next tour. I'm trying to optimize the sound, trying to get more of the kind of sound I like onstage out into the audience, and you can't always do that just by putting a mike in front of the amp.
Q: Are there certain settings you use on the 27O equalizer in conjunction with the guitar to achieve certain sounds?
FZ: It depends on what kind of hall I'm playing in. I'm real fussy about equalization, and sometimes there's a compromise between the kind of sound I want to get onstage and what the mixer needs to hear out in the audience, and I'll change things around like that

But I've used the 100-watt Marshall with the volume at about 4; I double the inputs into the bass channel (with a connecting cord), and the treble is on about 4, and the bass at about 3; midrange will be anywhere from 6 to 8; and the presence will vary from 6 to 10. This is the average - the bass could be as high as 10 or as low as 0 depending on how much bottom is needed. And on the 270 the volume will be on 4; treble all the way up; the bright switch is on; the midrange wlil be on about 75%; the bass will be about 80%; the graphic equalizer is all the way up at 80 cycles; about 80% at 160, all the way up at 320, just about flat at 640, and maybe a little bit of boost at 1250.

Q: Is this the same equipment you use for recording?

FZ: In the studio most of the stuff is played through a Pignose. I've done all kinds of things with a Pignose; I've taken it and put it in a "live" chamber and taken an (ElectroVoice) RE-20 and stuck it right in front of the Pignose, and that will get one kind of sound. It's actually the sound of an amp, but you can hear that it's in a room, and the room is resonant, so it's a realistic sound. On *Zoot Allures* about the only thing I used the Vox bottom and the Marshall top for was to get feedback on a song called "Filthy Habits." There's another song called "The Torture Never Stops" where it's just Pignose. Another thing I've done with the Pignose is just put it out in the middle of a dead studio, put two mikes on it, and mike it in stereo. It gets a good sound. Put one mike behind the other so there's a slight spread to it. I've also put the Piguose in an echo chamber and miked it, but not too close, because the echo chamber is real resonant. Since the amplifier isn't real loud, if you put the mike a foot away from the amp, you're going to get a sound that really approaches what you hear in a hockey rink. Anybody who's working in a studio and wants to try this, just tell the engineer to disconnect the speaker cables in the echo chamber and put a plug (phone jack) on the end of the echo send, and plug the echo send into your Pignose. Then you can sit in the control room, plug your guitar directly into the board, send it to the echo chamber on the echo send, and hear yourself coming back - and it sounds like you're in a hockey rink. You can even make it feed back by long distance. I've been using a Pignose for about the last three or four years. I think I started using it the most on *Apostrophe*, but there is some on Over-Nite Sensation, too.

Q: Do you feel more comfortable playing in a live situation as opposed to the studio?

FZ: Yes. I mean, I have had a few laughs in the studio, but the problem is that in a studio I'm my own producer, and I've got so many other electronic things to worry about that it distracts me from just getting in there and playing the instrument. You can go out on the road, and once the house lights go down, and the red light comes on, it's a different story. I usually play my best stuff on the road.

Q: Are your solos on record improvised first takes, or are they conceived beforehand?

FZ: It depends on what the song is; very rarely are they first-take things. But they aren't things where I'd sit down and work out the whole solo in advance before I played it. I can't do that, I can't remember it. Usually what I do if I get something going, I'll lay down 20 bars or so, and stop the tape, back it up, and punch in, and take up where I left off. I try to have the event that's going on the record make musical sense and fit in with what's going on; because a record is a fixed object, it doesn't change. It's not a song anymore, it's an object. If you're playing a song on the road it can change every night. It can be something, it comes alive each time you play it, and it has its own existence. But once you've committed it to wax, it never changes. So if you're going to leave your guitar solo on, you're stuck with that for the life of the record. I'm fairly fussy about it, but I'm sure I let a few go out on record that I could probably do better now. But I hope that's the way it's always going to be.

Q: Have there been songs in the past that you've written specifically as guitar vehicles?

FZ: Not really, no. There are a few now that I've designed that way. I figure that since I've been playing for about 20 years or so, I might as well start doing that.

Q: What scales do you work from?

FZ: My solos are speech-influenced rhythmically; and harmonically they're either pentatonic or poly-scale oriented. And there's the Mixolydian mode, which I also use a lot.
Q: You don't really play a lot of blues licks in your solos?
FZ: I can, I have. I started off that way. But I'm more interested in melodic things. I think the biggest challenge when you go to play a solo is trying to invent a melody on the spot. I also think that a guitar player can only be as good as the band that's accompanying him. If the people backing you up are sensitive to what you're playing, you'll sound great; if they're just note-mashers, then you'll always sound mundane.
Q: Are those the qualities you look for in a backing musician?
FZ: I've always had good rhythm section players, but I wouldn't say that they've always been too enthusiastic about what I was playing, or understood it very well, or really got into it. Because if a person's from the jazz world, they're going to play worlds of gnat-notes, clouds of pentatonic gnat-notes that really don't amount to shit. Or if they're from the blues world they want somebody who gets on three notes and goes squirm-squirm-squirm. It's hard to explain to guys just coming into the band, the rhythmic concept I have about playing, because it's based on ideas of metrical balance - long, sustained events versus groupettoes that are happening with a lot of notes on one beat. Like a lot of sextuplets, septuplets, and things like that. A lot of times I'll play 13 notes over a half note and try to space it evenly so it flows. This is sort of against the grain of rock and roll, which likes to have everything in exactly duple or triple, straight up and down, so you can constantly tap your foot to it But I prefer to have the rhythm section be aware of where the basic pulse of the time is and create a foundation that won't move, so I can flow over the top of it. It's hard to do, it's hard to get people to do that. And it's also hard to get them to leave some space for where the fast notes occur. Rhythm sections always have a tendency to copy: If they hear somebody else playing fast notes, they want to play fast notes too, and then you can't hear any fast notes any more. I've always had good rhythmic rapport with Aynsley Dunbar- I thought he was really good, drum-wise. And Terry Bozzio, the drummer in the group now, is excellent. He has a tendency to frenzy out a little bit, but I just figure that's because he's from San Francisco.
Q: What about playing with (bass guitarist) Jack Bruce on Apostrophe?
FZ: Well, that was just a jam thing that happened because he was a friend of (drummer) Jim Gordon. I found it very difficult to play with him; he's too busy. He doesn't really want to play the bass in terms of root functions; I think he has other things on his mind. But that's the way jam sessions go. On that solo on "Apostrophe" I'm using an SG with a Barcus-Berry on the bridge, and that's being sent to one of the channels, then the other side is coming out of a Pignose. And there's an attack differential between how fast the Barcus-Berry speaks and how fast the Pignose speaks. So you've got a sharp attack on one side and then the rest of the note following it on the other. And on "Stink-Foot" (*Apostrophe*) there's an interesting sound where I'm using an acoustic guitar with a magnetic pickup on it and a Barcus-Berry on the bridge. The Barcus-Berry is going into one channel, and the maguetic pickup is going to a Mu-tron and the other channel, so you have a sharp attack and an enveloped attack. It gives a lot of space.
Q: You don't play a lot of acoustic guitar?
FZ: No, but I like it. Since most of my life is oriented toward the road, rather than the studio, there's not much opportunity to play sensitively on your acoustic guitar except in a hotel room. The rest of what we do is high-volume stuff. I have a real nice Martin - I don't know what the model number is, but it has a classical-width neck thatj oins the body right at the 12th fret, in a jumbo shell. I also have an Ovation and a bouzouki with a Barcus on it. I've recorded some stuff with that, but it hasn't been released yet; I have some duets I did with (violinist) Jean-Luc Ponty that turned out real nice. I also have a Gibson round-hole acoustic with a pickup right next to the fingerboard - I don't know what model number it is either. I like that guitar, it's got a good neck on it. I just lucked out, because I don't think

all the necks are good on Gibsons. In fact, they're usually a little too pudgy for my hand; I like to get them shaved down.
Q: Since you've used both Fender and Gibson guitars, do you have any preference for one over the other?
FZ: I use them for things that they're good for. The Strat has a drier sound - it has more of an acute, exact sound - and I use the Gibson for more of a sweat-hog type of sound.
Q: Is there any reason why you don't often work with other guitarists?
FZ: Well, I have. But double leads just never seemed appropriate to what I was doing. Sneaky Pete (Kleinow, pedal steel) was in the band for a while, but he couldn't stay; he had too many other appointments.
Q: Do you ever play slide guitar?
FZ: No, but I do have a fretless guitar, and I'm pretty good on that. At one time Acoustic manufactured a fretless guitar, they made a prototype and tried to interest people in it, but nobody wanted it. So the prototype ended up at Guitar Center. I walked in there one day and asked them if they had anything new, and they said, "Have we got one for you!" And they brought out this thing, and it was really neat, so I bought it for $75. The only restriction was they had to take a chisel and some black paint and scratch off the word "Acoustic" on the headpiece, because Acoustic didn't want anybody to know that they had made such a grievous error as to make a fretless guitar. I've put a Barcus-Berry on that, too, and I send the magnetic pickup to the left and the Barcus on the right The thing that sounds like a sllde guitar on "The Torture Never Stops" is actually a fretless. It's also on "San Ber'dino" and "Can't Afford No Shoes" (both from *One Size Fits All*). It's different than a regular guitar; you don't push the strings to bend them, you move them back and forth like violin-type vibrato, which is a funny movement to get used to. But you can play barre chords on it - it's fun.
Q: Are there guitar players you listen to?
FZ: There are a few that I've heard recently who I think are real good. I like Brian May of Queen-I think he's really excellent. And I always did like Wes Montgomery until they started smothering him with violins. I think his best album is one on Fantasy that just has him and his brothers playing "Lover Man" and "Monterey Blues" (*The Montgomery Brothers*, Fantasy). I like the Johnny Guitar Watson records from the early '5Os; they're really good. And I especially like Gultar Slim. His solo on "The Story ofMyLife" (*The Things That I Used To Do*, Specialty) is one of the best early distorted guitar solos; it really sounds like he's mad at somebody.
Q: What about the contemporary heavies, like Jeff Beck or John McLaughlin?
FZ: I like Jeff, yeah. I've listened to *Wired* (Epic), and there are a couple of solos on there that I like. And I like some of his stuff on *Rough and Ready* (Epic). A person would be a moron not to appreciate McLaughlin's technique. The guy has certainly found out how to operate a guitar as if it were a machine gun. But I'm not always enthusiastic about the lines I hear or the ways in which they're used. I don't think you can fault him, though, for the amount of time and effort it must have taken to play an instrument that fast I think anybody who can play that fast is just wonderful. And I'm sure 90% of teenage America would agree, since the whole trend in the business has been "faster is better."
Q: You're pretty fast yourself?
FZ: Well, I'm not really a fast guitar player, because I'm not picking everything I play. I only play fast when I think it's appropriate to the line I'm doing.
Q: How do you see your role as a guitarist as different fom that of a Beck or a McLaughlin?
FZ: I think that's a matter of advertising more than anything else. Once I get out onstage and turn my guitar on, it's a special thing to me -I love doing it. But I approach it more as a composer who happens to be able to operate an instrument called a guitar, rather than "Frank Zappa, Rock and Roll Guitar Hero."

Q: How does your playing differ in your current four-piece band as opposed to the larger orchestrated groups you've worked with in the past?
FZ: It differs quite a bit, because with a larger group you have to play less - there are a lot of people waking in line to play solos, That's one of the reasons I've got a smaller group now, because I happen to like to play solos, and I happen to think I'm in a specialized category from the stuff I play, and I don't think there's any reason why I should have to walt in line (*laughs*). I have some stuff to say, and I'm going to get out there and do it.
Q: Have you ever thought of using another producer, to allow your-self more time with the guitar?
FZ: I would if I thought I could find somebody who would produce things the way I want to hear them. But the details that I worry about when I go into a studio are how the board is laid out, what EQ is going to be on the stuff you're listening to in the headphones, what kind of echo you're going to be using, how long you should be taking to do such-and-such a thing because at $150 an hour you don't want to be wasting your time in there. It's hard once you've got all that stuff sat up to just walk in and play and forget about it. I'll spend anywhere from three to nine hours just getting the sound on the rest of the band right before I'll record. On this new album (*ZootAllures*) it's different, because I did a lot of tracks just starting with a Rhythm Ace and building all the stuff up from there. What I usually do is, play the guitar from the control board while the band is playing, or else have the band lay down a track and then put mine on later.
Q: Are there songs where you've recorded more than just a rhythm and lead track?
FZ: Yes, "Po-Jama People" (*One Size FitsAll*), and there are a couple on the new album that have anywhere from three to five guitar parts. "Filthy Habits" (*ZootAllures*) has five guitar parts; and then there were also a few multiple-guitar-part things on *We're Only in It for the Money* and *UncleMeat.*
Q: You've been playing for two decades now. what else do you plan to do with the guitar?
FZ: The hardest thing for me to do is play straight up and down, absolutely the hardest to do. Stuff that everybody else does naturally just seems as impossible as shit to me. I don't think in little groups of twos and fours and stuff- they just don't come out that way. I can sit around and play fives and sevens all day long with no sweat. But the minute I've got to go do-do-do-do, do-do-do-do it feels weird, it's like wearing tight shoes. So I'm going to keep practicing. It's like leaming how to speak English if you've been speaking something else all the time. It's like trying to develop a convincing English accent.
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Zappa vs. the Bleeding Gums

by Peter Lopilato
Primo Times (Indiana Magazine of Popular Culture) December 1977

"You don't know me very well," Frank Zappa - bearded, ponytailed, topless - gazed down at the crowd of 3,000 milling around in the Louisville Gardens (I used the term "milling" quite literally - this was the most mobile concert I'd ever attended; in some respects, in fact, it was more like a convention, like those television broadcasts of the Democratic Convention - I'm still surprised that I wasn't propositioned by an FBI agent).

"And I don't know you very well," Zappa continued, pacing back and forth across the stage, sometimes smiling, sometimes scowling at the crowd. "We really haven't had time to get acquainted - I haven't been here in Louisville for two or three years and you've probably been very busy attending Kiss concerts and stuff like that.

"So what we're gonna do now is sing a song with real easy-to-understand lyrics, real stupid chords, and a real simple beat. That way we can reach you people."

After the show, in Frank Zappa's dressing room...

Primo: Your remarks about getting acquainted with the audience - to me they indicate a sort of sublimated contempt for you audience.

Zappa: If you think that, you have absolutely no understanding of my relationship with the audience.

Several hours later, back at my apartment...

I'm trying to figure out where I'd gone wrong. Here I'd had a chance to interview Frank Zappa, arguably the third most influential social commentator/philo- sopher of the post World War II generation (the other two being, of course, Marshall McLuhan and Gary Gilmore - not necessarily in that order). And I'd blown it. Well, maybe that's too strong, but Zappa and I definitely did not see eye-to-eye. I should have just agreed with everything he said. "Try and be agreeable for a change." - that's what my mother's always telling me.

I switch on the tape recording of the interview. Zappa's voice fills the room like that of the Wizard of Oz; "You don't know your a-"

I decide to watch TV instead. I turn on the set, Patty Duke is talking to John Boy Walton. What a pair.

Life's "New Youth" issue lays on the floor by the television)in my apartment, everything lays on the floor by the television). May as well check it out. Hmmm. Look at this. Right here on page 26. An IU student talking about the generation of the 70's:

"Compared to the 60's, we people don;t talk much. Silence has been our deliberate choice, and I think you will find it reflected in the art that my generation will produce. It will be an emotional holding back of emotion. We will have 'out-Zenned' the 60's generation."

Silent art...out-Zenning the 60's...the emotional holding back of emotion. Sounds like something Zappa would say. Wait a minute. That's something Zappa did say, at least in effect.

The television picture flickers, I adjust the fine tuning. Now John Boy is attacking Patty Duke. This can't be the Waltons (maybe it's the Democratic Convention). I peruse the TV listing. It's a film called *You'll Like My Mother*.

So that was it, that's where I'd gone wrong. I should have read Life as soon as I bought it, but I read Rolling Stone instead. Failing to take Life seriously led to my downfall. There's a moral here somewhere (maybe it's on the floor by the television).

Editor's Note: As we go to press, scraggly-bearded, Intensive Care Artist fan Peter Lopilato is still looking for the moral on the floor by the television. In his methodical search, he has found the following morals: "Too many cooks spoil the broth," "Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive," "Absolute power corrupts absolutely," and "Never trust adults" [which is the moral of anything J.D. Salinger ever wrote]. None of these morals, however, have anything to do with Frank Zappa. Here is the interview:

Primo: Last Christmas I saw you perform in New York and you had signs on stage that said "Warner Brothers Sucks," and now I see you've got the same thing written on the blackboard [outside the dressing room] -

Zappa: I'm consistent, aren't I?

Primo: This is true. I understand you're suing Warner Brothers over your new album. Would you like to talk about that?

Zappa: It's a breach of contract suit. Let's just leave it at that.

Primo: Before one of your songs tonight ["Bobby Brown Goes Down"] you addressed the audience and said, "I haven't been here in a Louisville in two or three years - I don't know why, but this is one of those cities I don't get to very often. So you people don't know me very well. And I don't know you very well. We really haven't had time to get acquainted - you've probably been very busy attending Kiss concerts and stuff like that. So what we're going to do now is sing a song with real easy-to-understand lyrics, real stupid chords, and a real simple beat. That way we can reach you people."

Your remarks about getting acquainted with the audience - to me they indicate a sort of sublimated contempt for your audience. Is that true?

Zappa: if you think that, you have absolutely no understanding of my relationship with the audience.

Primo: Well, what is the relationship between you and the audience?

Zappa: They're the only friends I've got.

Primo: Do you feel that at least some of the people in the audience don't fully appreciate what you are doing musically?

Zappa: Well, obviously you don't.

Primo: That may be. But do you feel that's true of a lot of other people?

Zappa: I don't think that's true of a lot. I think its probably true of a few, but for the most part the audiences love it.

Primo: the impression I got during the show tonight was that as long as you were in the forefront the audience was really into it. But whenever you moved back and took off on an instrumental solo, the audience seemed to be spacing out.

Zappa: Well, that's true the world over. There's no reason why I shouldn't play instrumentals. If the audience isn't exposed to it they'll never learn to like it.

Primo: Okay. But then is that one reason why your shows are a combination of instrumentals and songs with a lyrical emphasis?

Zappa: Absolutely.

Primo: But are you saying that if you did a two-hour concert of only instrumentals that people wouldn't enjoy it as much?

Zappa: I know they wouldn't. Neither would I. You think I don't enjoy jumpin' around out there?

Primo: How distanced are you from the subjects you sing about? Songs by other artists seem to be more emotional than yours.

Zappa: I can't help the way your tastes are oriented. I feel that people who sing songs dealing with the subject of love and stuff like that are writing songs for program directors. They're people who don't know shit. I think its real offensive for people to publicize their innermost feelings.The Intensive Care Artists suck. And I think if the people who go around singing about live knew the first fuckin' thing about it, they'd keep their mouths shut. The only thing they're really singing about is money. Because the only thing that gets on the radio is love songs.

I can't help it if you're a fan of that kind of music. And if you think that's emotion - you know, just because somebody plays a high note don't mean its emotion. Its mechanical shit. You just happen to fall for it. Along with about 20 million other people.

Primo: Okay, But you don't have to sing about love to be emotional. And -

Zappa: Wait a minute. Wait a minute! First of all, what you read as emotion is part of your conditioning. Its part of what people have told you emotion is supposed to look like, sound like, smell like, and act like. Would you recognize an emotion I had?

Primo: Of course not. because I don't know you well enough.

Zappa: Well, there you go. So what are you talkin' about? You're accusing me of being unemotional and saying that these other songs are emotional, and I'm accusing you of saying you don't know your ass.

Primo: I wasn't accusing you of being unemotional. I just said -

Zappa: No, no. Here's the question - as I recall it. You said, " To me, other peoples songs are more emotional."

Primo: Right.

Zappa: How do you know my songs aren't ten times more emotional than those other people's songs? I only way I would look like an emotional person to you is if I was out there singing "Baby, baby, baby" shit. Right?

Primo: Not necessarily. There are a lot of people who sing about other -

Zappa: Songs about "My good buddy died."

Primo: [pausing, carefully considering the question] Yeah, that might do it.

Zappa: What is emotion? First of all, it's a wank.

Primo: A wank??

Zappa: The Intensive Care Artists that get into that stuff are full of bullshit.

Primo: By Intensive Care Artists do you mean people like Jackson Browne?

Zappa: Yeah. People with bleeding gums.

Primo: And you don't sing those songs because of ethical considerations?

Zappa: That's right. And for aesthetic considerations as well. I don't think that its aesthetic.

Primo: And is that because of the product - the record album - is being mass merchandised?

Zappa: No. I just don't think that is what music is for. I don't think music is for the use of politicians or psychologists or psychiatrists.

Primo: What is it for then?

Zappa: Music is for entertaining the Muse. A musician is in the employ of the Muse. Then there are those other people who do love songs. They're in the employ of the program directors and the radio stations that play gum-bleed.

Primo: But you realize that some of those people would say, "I write love songs because that's what I feel. I'm only writing music for myself and no one else."

Zappa: They have to say that because none of them could dare be honest with you about the reason why they write those fuckin' songs. The biggest problem a person has about writing boy-girl situation songs is that there's a narrow spectrum of acceptable boy-girl situation. Boy-meets-girl. Boy-hangs-out-with-girl. Boy-holds-hands-with-girl. The-leaves-fall-down. Whatever! You know, you've got a spectrum that wide [spreading his hands about six inches apart]. Its a horrible challenge for these deep, sensitive people to sit there and grind out song after song within that ridiculous little spectrum.

Primo: I disagree. It's not what is said, but rather the way it's said. The situation doesn't matter. Besides, the human mind can only conceive of a finite number of structures anyway. That's the true art forms as well. There are only a finite number of possible plots for a novel.

Zappa: You think that's true?

Primo: Yeah.

Zappa: I think you're wrong. I think everything is infinite.

Primo: Except love songs.

Zappa: Love songs, as understood by the American public at large. Or world-wide record consumers - who are definitely a stagnant breed.

Primo: Okay. What you've said about "the American public at large" contradicts what you said earlier about you're audience. Do you think the knowledge of the American public at large is -

Zappa: The product of program directors who program the stations that play the music.

Primo: So, I guess you're saying that its not all that it should be.

Zappa: I'm saying that there are other things to listen to. Most Americans will never hear it.

Primo: Do you view your music as that which the American public is exposed to or that which it is not exposed to?

Zappa: I don't see program directors jumping over themselves to play my records.

Primo: Are you making a conscious attempt, then, to reach a wider audience?

Zappa: Of course. [then, matter of factly] I think everything I do is fantastic.

Primo: I'm not sure I agree with that. I think some of your stuff is real good but -

Zappa: If you don't like my music, that ends the interview.

Primo: [surprised, maybe even devastated] Well...I hope there are no hard feelings, I guess. [Sticking out his hand, feeling like it's the end of a tennis match.]

Zappa: [jumping over the net, gripping the extended hand] No hard feelings, no. I'm not emotional, remember?

Frank Zappa: Garni Du Jour, Lizard King Poetry and Slime

by Tim Schneckloth
Downbeat Magazine May 18, 1978

In the last 15 years, the boundaries between various musical genres have all but dissolved. And somewhere along the line, people began realizing that serious music doesn't have to be dealt with as a sacred entity--it can be approached with a sense of fun and irreverence; it can be juxtaposed with other, less valid kinds of music to create startlingly original statements.

Frank Zappa seems to have had this kind of vision all along. From the early days of the Mother Of Invention in the mid-'60s, Zappa's composing, arranging and performing have embraced any number of styles. And the question of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the sources doesn't seem to apply in Zappa's case. Everything fits into his unique artistic perspective.

After a long spell between releases, Zappa recently presented his public with Zappa In New York. Recorded live late `76, the album features a number of instrumental works that show off the talents of Randy and Mike Brecker, Ronnie Cuber, Tom Malone, Lou Marini and David Samuels, as well as Zappa's `76 touring unit.

For his most recent road trips, Zappa's band has consisted of Zappa and Adrian Belew on guitars, percussionists Terry Bozzio and Ed Mann, bassist Patrick O'Hearn, and Peter Wolf and Tommy Mars on keyboards. As might be expected from the presence of two keyboardists in the band, synthesizers have a lot to do with defining Zappa's current sound. The following interview focuses on that instrument, as well as observations on the state of contemporary music.

Schneckloth: What are you up to now?
Zappa: I've been in the studio doing overdubs on some live material. I like that process because you can get rhythm tracks with live excitement. Then you can go in and add orchestration to them.

Schneckloth: It seem like you've done a lot of live albums over the years.
Zappa: Some of them have been totally live, some have had orchestration added on. Fillmore East was about 90% pure live; Just Another Band From L.A. was 100%. That was a four-track recording right off the p.a. Roxy And Elsewhere had some things that were live, some were overdubbed.

Schneckloth: In the last few years, it seems you've been going away from larger orchestrated things back to a fairly basic rock band format. Is there a conscious reason for that?
Zappa: No, I do whatever I feel like doing. See, all you know about what I've done is what's been released on records. And all you know about that is what you've listened to. Right now, I think there are about 45 albums out that I've made over the last 14 years. Chances are you haven't heard all of that, and that's maybe 50% of what's actually available to be released. I've got orchestra stuff that's been recorded, more elaborate compositions that haven't been released yet. They're just sitting around waiting for a home.

Schneckloth: Do you anticipate releasing it all someday?
Zappa: Oh yeah, I hope so. It's very difficult to do because record companies, in order to protect their investment, try to avoid putting out more than two albums per year on an artist because they want to milk the sales on each release as thoroughly as possible. I think that's a fantasy in my case because we sell so much in catalog. Whether the album becomes a hit when it's first released is irrelevant, because the stuff just keeps selling. People hear about it by word of mouth.

Schneckloth: That's true. Looking through record stores, I notice most of your stuff is still there, even going back to the Verve things. That's unusual.
Zappa: Maybe it's because some of the things that were said on those early albums are things that still remain true today, and there are young people who want to hear that stuff being said. I don't need to repeat myself. If I've already done it once on an album, I don't need to go back and do it again.

Schneckloth: There's a lot of talk about the mellowed-out `70s--how the world's falling asleep. Do you miss anything about the `60s? Was there an urgency to making music then that doesn't exist now?
Zappa: I don't miss the `60s at all. I don't miss anything.

Schneckloth: Things haven't changed that much?
Zappa: Well, they do change, but I feel those changes are external to the way I do things.

Schneckloth: What about your audiences?
Zappa: Oh, they change. They change every season.

Schneckloth: What about your audiences now? Are they more jaded? Do they demand more in the way of entertainment?
Zappa: They're more enthusiastic. They're more alert because there's less acid being used--which is not to say they don't use other things. But the type of drug that is popular with the audience has some bearing on the way in which they perceive things. There was so much acid during the `60s that it was very easy for large numbers of people to think they had seen God as soon as the Beatles went boom, boom, boom, you know? So that particular chemical made a lot of really peculiar things possible in terms of musical sales. And since the status of that drug has been wearing off, and other things are taking its place--notably wine and beer--you have a different kind of audience mentality.

Schneckloth: I would think you've kept a lot of your original audience--people who are around 30 now.
Zappa: Some of them still come to the concerts. But usually they don't, because now that they have wives, kids, mortgages, day jobs and all the rest of that stuff, they don't want to stand around in a hockey rink and be puked on by some 16-year-old who's full of reds. So consequently, our audience gets younger and younger. We've picked up a larger number of female audience participants and there's been an increase in black attendance.

Schneckloth: How do European audiences react to your music?
Zappa: The audience in London is very similar to the audience in L.A.--which is to say, singularly boring and jaded. The audiences in some of the smaller places in Germany are more like East Coast or Midwest audiences--they have a good sense of humor, they like to make a lot of noise, but they're not obnoxious. And then you have you pseudo-intellectual audiences like in Denmark. Paris is a pretty good audience; I'd have to give Paris like a

San Francisco rating.

Schneckloth: Maybe one of these days the State Department will ask you to go to the Soviet Union or something.
Zappa: I don't think the State Department is ever going to seek my services. And if I go to the Soviet Union, it won't be for a long time, I'll tell you. I'm not a communist enthusiast.

Schneckloth: As a rock musician, it seems you're carrying on a tradition that you don't hear that much of any more--the long, blues-based guitar solo. Nowadays you don't hear much that's over three minutes.
Zappa: Well, a reason for that is because you only have a certain number of minutes to deal with on an album side and it's a big risk to fill up album grooves with a lengthy solo because they don't all sustain interest.

Schneckloth: It may be getting progressively harder to sustain interest with long things. Maybe it's all caught up in the disco thing--people have to hear things that are concise.
Zappa: I don't care about that stuff. I figure that a person that's buying my record is interested in what I'm doing, okay? And I do him a favor by doing what I FEEL like doing, because then he hears who I am at that moment in time. If they don't like it, fine. If they don't, they can go out and buy another record, I don't care. I don't claim to be a universal entertainer, a man for all seasons...I don't want to run the entire show.

Schneckloth: What are the ramifications of Dipso mania?
Zappa: Disco music makes it possible to have disco entertainment centers. Disco entertainment centers make it possible for mellow, laid-back, boring kinds of people to meet each other and reproduce.

Schneckloth: Driving around Los Angeles listening to the AM radio, everything somehow seems more appropriate; it seems to FIT better than in other places--disco, Tom Scott, sax solos, country-rock...
Zappa: Tragic, isn't it? I'm not too much for that laid-back syndrome. That's the kind of music that, if you had to have something piddling away in the background while you did you job, country-rock would be better than clarinet and an accordion and a trombone playing Anniversary Waltz. It's superior to that kind of music for that function. But as a musical statement, it doesn't get me too much.

Schneckloth: You're well known as a satirist of many facets of pop music--things like long, overwritten rock poetry. You used to call it Lizard King poetry. Does that kind of comedy writing come easy for you?
Zappa: Oh yeah, you can crank it out by the yards, man. There's so much negative stimuli to make it happen
.
Schneckloth: Do you think you'd make a good gag writer for somebody like Johnny Carson?
Zappa: Gee, do you think he'd stay on TV if I was writing gags for him? Only let's face it, there ARE a lot of things to laugh at. I mean, Lizard King poetry is only scratching the surface. And there are plenty of proponents of pseudo-Lizard King poetry today. I've always felt that poets who decided to pick up a musical instrument and get into the World Of Rock were really not good. There's hardly anybody around that qualifies for the title poet anyway. And when they take it to the extreme of playing an instrument badly and having simplified monotone background so they can recite their dreck over it--I think it's too

fake for my taste. But if hearing that kind of music or Lizard King poetry reaffirms your belief in life itself, well, then you're entitled to hear it. I'm glad that it's available for all the people in the world who need it.

Schneckloth: Speaking of humor, I saw you on Saturday Night Live a while back. How did you get Don Pardo to debase himself like that? [NBC announcer Pardo had assumed the title role in a spirited rendition of Zappa's I'm the Slime.]
Zappa: Debase himself? That's not right. That's really not right. First of all, he has a good sense of humor. Second, he really enjoyed doing that. And thirdly, he actually came to the concerts we played in New York after the show and performed with us live on stage. See, Pardo's never seen on screen on that show. He's never been seen. The man has been working there for 30 years and nobody knows what he looks like. So I thought, fantastic, let's bring Don Pardo live out on stage and let the world see him. We got him a white tuxedo; he did some narration for some of the songs we were doing; we brought him out to sing I'm The Slime. And the audience loved him...the highlight of his career. He's a nice guy; I really like him. And I don't think it was debasing at all. It was giving him an opportunity to expand in OTHER REALMS.

Schneckloth: I was using the term...
Zappa: Facetiously? Facetiousness hardly ever translates onto print.

Schneckloth: How do your bands come together? Is there an element of accident?
Zappa: Well, I found a lot of people just by going into bars and seeing bar bands. I'll find one guy out of a band that sounds good to me, get his name and address, and when I have an opening for that instrument, I'll get in touch with him, bring him to California and have him audition. Sometimes they make it, sometimes they don't.

Schneckloth: What kinds of things do you look for?
Zappa: A combination of skill and attitude.

Schneckloth: Does a person have to know how to read to be in your band?
Zappa: It always helps. The main thing a person has to have is very fast pattern recognition and information storage capability. That's because we play like a two, two-and-a-half hour show non-stop with everything organized. There are solos, and those are improvised. But the sequence of events is planned out so that the show is tight and the audience doesn't have to sit around and wait for something to happen. So it requires a lot of memorization--fast memorization. You can't spend a year teaching somebody a show. With the band that I've had on the road for the past two tours, we spent three months, five days a week, six hours a day memorizing it and getting it just right. Now that's a very expensive investment, because it's $13,250 a week for rehearsals--we rehearse with full equipment, full crew and a soundstage. So I prefer people who learn fast.

Schneckloth: There was a time when you had to adjust your writing to the capabilities of your players.
Zappa: I still do.

Schneckloth: You mean there are times when you'd like to write some things that are so complex that you can't get anybody to play them on tour?
Zappa: Every day. I'll tell you, the kind of musicians I need for the bands that I have doesn't exist. I need somebody who understands polyrhythms, has good enough execution on the instrument to play all kinds of styles, understands staging, understands rhythm and blues, and understands how a lot of different composition techniques function.

When I give him a part, he should know how it works in the mix with all the other parts. You'd be surprised how many people who have chops in one department are completely deficient in others.

Schneckloth: Maybe one of the difficulties with performing your music is the surprise factor--different sound, different instrumentations, different rhythms come at the listener in abrupt shifts.
Zappa: See, that's only unusual if you're accustomed to music that's boring and bland and all the same color. That's not the way music should be, I feel. What to you is an abrupt shift is functional orchestration to me. If you change the color of the instrumentation that's playing a certain part of a line, it changes the emotional value of the line; it changes its relative importance.

Schneckloth: Leading into the subject of synthesizers, does it get harder to find sounds that will surprise, sounds that aren't bland?
Zappa: Absolutely not. That surface hasn't even been scratched yet. Without even touching a synthesizer, there are so many things you can make with normal instruments, and in a diatonic context. There are so many people who are dashing away from diatonic music in order to give the appearance of being modern--which I think is a waste of time.

Schneckloth: Do you write specifically with synthesizers in mind?
Zappa: I have. I've developed different types of notation that accommodate the different things that synthesizers can do--like parallel chord tracking and things like that. There are ways of indicating what kind of parallel chord the thing is going to track. Then you can just add a little inscription at the head of the bar, kind of like a key signature. Next, you write a single line, and, if the guy sets his synthesizer up right, that single line will yield parallel chords tracking around. So it saves you a lot of writing on paper.

Schneckloth: How do you arrive at the synthesizer sounds you want?
Zappa: Well, obviously the best way to deal with music is according to your own ear and your own personal taste. And since most synthesizers that people work with are production models off the assembly line, and there are slight differences in the way the settings of the knobs respond, if you're a composer and you're writing out a complete description of what all the knobs are supposed to be set at, chances are that you won't get the exact same result each time from instrument to instrument. It's just because of different things about the parts. So the first thing you have to know is how to talk to the synthesizer player. If you're a composer or arranger and you want to use the synthesizer, you have to know all the basic language of what the instrument is dealing with. You have to know what an oscillator is; you have to know what a filter is; you have to know what an envelope is; and all the rest of that stuff. So when you tell the guy, No, that's wrong, I want more of THIS, you're not telling him in romantic terms, you're saying, Give me more frequency modulation or Open your filter up to make it brighter. Just so you can communicate with the people who play the instruments. The way I learned was by buying an ARP 2600, getting the manual, and just sitting around and piddling with it. Then I got a mini-Moog and a lot of other kinds of synthesizers and got my own hands on them, even thought I'm not a keyboard player. I was just familiarizing myself with them.

Schneckloth: I understand the percussionists in you band are using drum synthesizers.
Zappa: That's very true. Not only do we use them as drums, we use them as synthesizers. We started doing something on the last tour that I think Pollard [manufacturer of the Syndrum] is going to be pretty thrilled about when he hears it. Terry Bozzio got to be very

good with the Syndrum--he can control them fantastically well and still be playing his set. He can reach over and change the setting and still keep time. For some of the things we were doing, if you put the sustain on the Syndrum up to a very long time, you can hit it and get like a constant pitch coming out. And if you move the little knob, you can play tunes on it. So I had chorales between the two keyboard players and the two Syndrums and the bass. All I did was conduct a downbeat, and anybody could hit any note they wanted on that downbeat. And every time I'd conduct a beat, they'd pick another note. The results were fantastic.

Schneckloth: How about the guitar synthesizers? Have you tried those?
Zappa: Yeah. The problem with guitar synthesizers, versus me, is the way I play. There's so much left hand business going on, and the synthesizer is more interested in what's happening with the pick. In order for the synthesizer to track what you're playing, it prefers to see one string, with nothing else being held or rattling, neatly picked so that the note just comes right out. Then the synthesizer can make up its mind and play the note for you. But the faster you play, and the more pull-off, hammer-on stuff you do with the left hand, the harder it is for the synthesizer to track you...It requires a more legitimate guitar technique... I'm not adverse to guitar synthesizers. I think the idea is good, but, to me, it's not going to be a practical musical thing to deal with until the synthesizer will play exactly what you're playing and not just give you a hint of it--so that the synthesizer won't get in the way of your style. Right now, it's kind of like the tail wagging the dog, because you have to slow yourself down and play in a different way in order to make the thing talk.

Schneckloth: Have you ever used a really large synthesizer setup in the studio?
Zappa: I've got one, but I've never used it in the studio. It's an EU, and it's about a $50,000 system. It's got a computer and all that stuff. I don't have it set up; it's in storage. Stevie Wonder called the office the other day wanting to rent it.

Schneckloth: How much work is involved in setting it up?
Zappa: It requires a technician. It's fairly easy to set it up and put it all together. It's portable; it was designed to be taken on the road. But there's so many modules and stuff built into it that I prefer to have someone who is conversant with the electronic ins and outs of it set it up for me and tell the keyboard player what to do with it. I have enough to worry about with the console without having to worry about the synthesizer. It's got 14 oscillators or something like that.

Schneckloth: What other kinds of keyboard synthesizers do you tour with?
Zappa: For the last U.S. tour we had a very elaborate set up. We had two players and each had about eight instruments. Peter Wolf was playing a Rhodes, and Electrocomp, a mini-Moog, the Eu, a Clavinet, an ARP 2600, and a Yamaha Electric Grand. Tommy Mars had a Hammond, a Yamaha Electric Grand, an Electrocomp, and ARP String Synthesizer, a Clavinet and a Roland.

Schneckloth: When you get all that stuff together, it seems like the arranging problems would be really complex.
Zappa: It doesn't make the problems complex, no. It gives you more latitude. But it makes the performance a little bit more difficult. The more things there are to stick your hands on, the more wires there are to get out of whack when you set it up every day.

Schneckloth: There are those who take a somewhat snobbish view of synthesizer playing. They feel that a person really has to know exactly what's happening electronically with the instrument in order to be a truly good synthesizer player.

Zappa: A guy's got to start somewhere. You've got to mess around with it. Even if you think you know how they work, there's always a chance that you'll come up with something new just by doing a dumb experiment. Remember: dumbness is the American way. Dumbness has created more progress for this country--just from people saying, Well, I really don't know what's going on here, but let's try this. And then they come up with something great. The best example of that is Thomas Edison. You know about the filament in the electric light bulb, don't you? He'd tried everything until he finally said, I'd be willing to try a piece of dental floss with some cheese on it if I thought it would work.

Schneckloth: What about those who feel that synthesizer, and electric instruments in general, somehow detract from the humanity of the music being played?
Zappa: Let me tell you something about that kind of thinking. People who worry about that are worried about their own image as a person performing on the instrument. In other words, the instrument is merely a subterfuge in order for the musician to communicate his own personal, succulent grandeur to the audience--which to me is a disservice to the music as an art form. It's the ego of the performer transcending the instrument. Now when you start talking about humanity--who cares about that? If you're going to play music, I think the music is important. And I think the guys that say this makes it less human aren't really talking about the feel of the music, they're talking about something that's going to get in the way of the audience understanding how swell they are. You've seen soloists get up there--they're not playing music, they're playing their egos out. And there are whole bands of people who get together to do nothing but explain to the audience through their instruments how fabulous they are. Well, who gives a shit? I don't want to go and see somebody's deep inner hurt in a live performance. I don't want to hear their personal turmoil on a record, either. I like music.

Schneckloth: Can't it be a moving thing to hear somebody express his soul through, say, a very sad-sounding trumpet solo?
Zappa: I don't care about souls; that's the Maharishi's department. See, I take a real cold view about that stuff. I think that music works because of psycho-acoustical things--like the way in which a line will interact with the harmonic climate that's backing it up. And all the rest of it is subjective on behalf of the listener. Maybe you WANTED to hear a sad trumpet solo, but it wouldn't be sad unless the notes he was playing were interacting in a certain way against the background. The best test is: if it was a 24-track recording, take the same trumpet solo, change the chord progression behind it, and see if it sounds sad any more. People see and hear what they want to see and hear. If you're in the mood, or have a deep, personal need for sad music or soul-searching or sensitivity in that stuff, you'll find it wherever it is. You'll go into an art gallery and be totally amazed by the things you see, whereas I might go into the gallery and go hah? This is a gross example, but say a person buys a Kiss album and listens to it and has a moving experience from it. I mean, are they wrong?

Schneckloth: Well, people go crazy at their concerts, and that may be understandable.
Zappa: I'm not talking about their concerts. Take the fire bombs away, take the blood capsules and the rest of that stuff away. Just listen to the record. There are people who listen to the records and get off on them.

Schneckloth: Speaking of that band, you once said, Americans hate music, but they love entertainment.
Zappa: You want me to explain that to you?

Schneckloth: Yeah, if you would.
Zappa: Sure. The reason they hate music is that they've never stopped to listen to what the musical content is because they're so befuddled by the packaging and merchandising that surround the musical material they've been induced to buy. There's so much peripheral stuff that helps them make their analysis of what the music is. Here's the simplest example: Take any record, stick it in a white jacket and hand it to somebody and let him listen to it. The next day, hand him the same record with a real album cover--with a picture and some type on the back that gives him some key to what the music is. The results are completely different. The way in which the material is presented is equally important as what's on the record. It's the GARNI DU JOUR way of life. You go buy a hamburger. If somebody gives you a hamburger on a dish, it means one thing. If somebody gives you a hamburger on a dish with a piece of green stuff and a wrinkled carrot and a radish--even though you don't eat that stuff--it's a Deluxe Hamburger. It's the same piece of dog meat on the inside, but one's got the GARNI DU JOUR. American have become accustomed to having a GARNI DU JOUR on everything... Maybe the world is moving too fast for this now, but in the old days, you used to be able to go to a record store and listen to the record before you bought it. You can't do that now, and that's been one of the major factors in the type of merchandising we have in music today.

Schneckloth: Over the years you've managed to turn the system to your advantage. To what do you attribute you longevity in the music business?
Zappa: What do you attribute Stravinsky's longevity in the music business to? He didn't want to stop composing. I'm just using that as an example; I'm not comparing myself to Stravinsky in any other way. I'm just saying that if a person wants to write music, he's going to do it whether he's getting performances or not, and that's the attitude I take. I started off putting a band together because I wrote music and I wanted to hear it and nobody else would play it.

Schneckloth: On the subject of performing, you've always been underrated as a rock guitar player. I guess you'd call it a blues-based style, but it's very original and distinctive.
Zappa: The basis of that kind of music is derived just as much from Eastern music as it is from the blues.

Schneckloth: Where does it come from?
Zappa: I think it's just natural to me. Part of the Eastern influence is like Greek, Turkish, Bulgarian kinds of sounds as well as Indian sounds.

Schneckloth: Have the various composers who have influenced your writing had any effect on your guitar style?
Zappa: Well, I think that if there's anything from the composers I like that's incorporated in my guitar playing, it's Stravinsky's idea of economy of means, because I'll take just a few notes and change the rhythm. If you want to look at it in purely scientific terms, you have a chord that tells you where you harmonic climate is--where the event is taking place. The chord is like the establishing shot in a movie--where you see the exterior of the building, or the alley with the garbage cans. It tells you where it's happening. Then the action takes place. So you have a chord, and you have three notes that provide certain types of emotional activity versus the chord. And that emotional activity is redefined every time you change the order of the notes and the space in between the notes. That's the kind of stuff I'm dealing with. When you listen to the thing in continuity, it sounds like there's a line going on and there's something happening. But what's really happening in the solo is this: for each harmonic climate that's presented, there are experiments being conducted, in real

time, with different notes and weights and measures of those different notes, versus the climate. And every time you change the position of the note, it has a different impact. That's especially true of bent notes.

Schneckloth: Do you still get an exhilaration from playing live? Does it make the whole thing worthwhile?
Zappa: It's the greatest thing there is. As a matter of fact, it is the ONLY thing that makes it worthwhile. Some of the drudgery you have to go through on the road is so boring. And once you get a chance to do that...I wouldn't even care if there wasn't an audience there. It's just that you've got all the equipment set up, the musicians are there and paid for, the lights are on, it's just the right temperature, the stage is the right color, it's the right mood. And then you play, and you can create things right there. And fortunately, there are cassettes of it so you have a chance to hear it back later and see if your experiments were successful or what. That's one of the prime reasons for me going out on the road and touring.

Schneckloth: Do you think of yourself primarily as a guitar player then?
Zappa: No, I think of myself as a composer who happens to have the guitar as his main instrument. Most composers used to play the piano. Well, I'm not a piano player, so obviously, because of the technical limitations of the guitar versus the piano--in terms of multiple notes and so on--the stuff I write is determined by my interest in the guitar. And consequently, it provides difficulties for other instruments. If I hear something in my head that's guitar based--blends, and stuff like that--a lot of times, those things can't be executed on other instruments. So it provides a slight element of frustration when you hear your lines played on instruments other than what they were intended to be played on.

Schneckloth: As far as the technical limitations of the guitar are concerned, with the electric guitar today, it seems you can do almost anything--legato stuff and so on.
Zappa: With feed back and sustain you can do some really beautiful legato stuff which wasn't possible before heavy amplification. In the earliest days of electric guitar playing, first you had the advantage of being heard at the same volume as the saxophone player. Then came fuzz, which gave you a chance to add a different emotional slant to your notes. In other words, a C note played clean is different from a C note played with fuzztone. It means two different things. One of them is wearing little white gloves and the other one has brass knuckles on.

Schneckloth: When you visualize it, it's the difference between a thin straight line and a thick, jagged one.
Zappa: Yes, it occupies more space. And when you get right down to it, what is music, really? Did you ever stop to think about what's really going on? Here's my theory. First of all, music functions in the time domain--there's decor and the time domain. That's the canvas you paint on when you're working with music. Another distinction: written music is to real music what a recipe is to real food. You can't listen to music on a piece of paper and you can't eat a recipe, so I put them both into the same category. And once the music comes off the paper and goes into the air, what you're literally doing is making a sculpture with the air, because your ear is detecting the peturbations in the air. It's decoding the way the air has been shaken by the different instruments. So the duration of your piece occupies a space of time--that's your canvas. And the medium you're working in is the air. So no matter what you play, you have to be consciously aware that it is not just a note. It is an impulse which is going to alter the shape of the air space, which in turn is going to be detected by the human ear. Now, you compound the misery when you start dealing with recorded material, because usually the material, if you're doing it in a studio, is being

recorded in a very unimpressive air space. It's blank, dead, uninteresting. All the reverberation is being added electronically. Furthermore, the person who finally listens to the piece is going to be listening to it on equipment that is not quite as spectacular as the stuff in the studio. So you have to rely on the efficiency of the home speaker to create your air sculpture live in person for the listener.

Schneckloth: That must get frustrating.
Zappa: Well, you know that the guy sitting in his house is never going to hear the sculpture the way it was designed, because most home units can't reproduce the top and bottom end the way they're supposed to be. All you're giving them is the mid-range. And there are also problems with disc recording. Discs can't reproduce everything you can get on a tape. And neither disc nor tape can give the listener the dynamic range you get in a live performance. I mean, you can turn the record up so it's loud, turn the bass up so it's beating on your chest, but it's not the same thing as sitting in a hockey rink and listening to an immense mass of air being shaped and moved around by heavy amplification. So what if there's a lot of echo? I like to play in hockey rinks.

Schneckloth: Don't they present a lot of problems?
Zappa: The problem about playing hockey rinks is that sometimes it's hard to hear the words. If you're word oriented, okay, that's tough. But that air space you have in there is such a great thing to work with--it's this huge tonnage of air. And when you go wham and hit a big chord, you've taken ALL THAT and spewed it over 15,000 people.

Schneckloth: That must be quite a feeling of power.
Zappa: It's not just a feeling of power. If you want to play really soft, think how soft one note is diluted in the air space of a 15,000 seat hockey rink. That's REALLY SOFT. And one note played really loud is REALLY loud. So the dynamic range in a place like that--softest note versus the loudest note, the top to bottom of your sculpture--with the right equipment, gives you a chance to do a more interesting and complicated sound event. Forget about whether it's a song or a drum beat or a scream on the microphone or whatever it is--those are sounds that are moving air around. Taken in the purest abstract sense, the opportunities in a large, enclosed, resonant place like that are very interesting.

Schneckloth: People still complain about those places though. I don't know if they're looking for intimacy, or what.
Zappa: That's because people have different desires when they go to a concert. The prime desire of the concert-goer is to see the person that they bought the ticket for reproduce the record they have at home. In other words, they want a human juke box; they want that replica. And they're never going to get it, not in a place like that, anyhow.

Schneckloth: Do you think the high amplification thing can be overdone?
Zappa: No, I think it's necessary, it really is. It's not just because it makes it louder, but if you have all that wattage, you don't have to run the thing at full blast, which gives you more head room and you get cleaner sound.

Schneckloth: How much work is involved in moving all that sound reinforcement equipment around?
Zappa: In the U.S. we use two 45-foot trucks and a 22. In Europe we were using two 40s. For every person on stage playing an instrument, there are two other guys in the crew. There's seven people in the band, 21 total traveling. And they all work. There are no traveling hangers-on. It's not like the Grateful Dead tour or something like that.

Schneckloth: I've seen you take your sound checks right up to the performance. The audience is already seated, and you're still working away at getting the sound right.
Zappa: Sometimes the trucks get held up and you can't have it all set up and waiting when the audience gets there. So you have to make a choice--are you going to be a star or are you going to play music? Some groups don't even do a sound check. We do one every day.

Schneckloth: Getting back to performing, how conscious are you of the outrageousness factor in your music?
Zappa: Wait a minute, let's examine what outrageous is. That means something deviates so far from the normal contemporary accepted standard that it appears outrageous. Well, after Watergate--finding out that the President of the United States may be a crook...I mean, what's outrageous? Is it outrageous to go on stage in a funny costume and spit foaming blood capsules all over the stage? Well, that's what people think is outrageous.

Schneckloth: It's all entertainment anyway.
Zappa: So you have to assume that Watergate was the finest entertainment America had to offer. I think the President we have now is not exactly of Watergate stature but will ultimately provide a certain amount of entertainment for the history books. The thing that marketed him in was the more-wholesome-than-thou attitude, and I don't believe people like that exist. ... You have this desire among the American people to find something nice. So anybody that is personally clean-looking and smiles a lot can get away with murder. It's the GARNI DU JOUR. It's equally true of the jazz world. The whole jazz syndrome is smothered in GARNI DU JOUR. People who really have very little to say on their instrument and have built their reputation on one or two albums have wound up forming and reforming into supergroups to produce jam session albums of little merit other than very fast pentatonic performance...

Schneckloth: The whole fusion thing--is that a dead end?
Zappa: Well, first of all, in order to be fusion, in order to match that marketing concept of what people think of as fusion--it has to SOUND fusion. This has little to do with whether of not it's actually fusing anything together. It just means that the keyboard player has to sound like Jan Hammer, the guitar player, drummer and bass player all have to play in a certain vein. And after each guy has molded himself into that certain syndrome, then the whole musical event that they perform has to be further molded into the syndrome. So what have you got? Nothing. It's wank music. The problem is that people then start looking down their noses at three-chord music or one-chord music or two-chord music. And with fusion music, what do you have? Some of it is three-chord music, it's just that the chords have more partials in them. Instead of being one, four, five, they're playing one two flat seven or some other simple progression that allows them to run a series of easily recognizable patterns over it. It's all mechanical. See, part of the problem is the way in which consumers use music to reinforce their idea of what their lifestyle is. People who think of themselves as young moderns, upwardly mobile, go for the fusion or disco--that slick, cleaned-up, precise, mechanical kind of music. And they tend to dislike everything else because it doesn't have its hair combed. Three-chord fuzztone music is not exactly the kind of thing that you'd expect a young executive to be interested in. He wants something that sounds like it might be really good to listen to riding around in a Maserati. So ultimately, that cheapens the music and whatever the musicians have done. ... But like I said, it's a good thing that all that music is there for all those people. Because without it, their lifestyle would lack something.

Zappa zaps religion and drugs

By Daniel S. Smith
The Lantern, September 21, 1978

Review

If the world is divided into leaders and followers, Frank Zappa is definitely a leader. Tuesday at Veterans Memorial Auditorium, Zappa was in complete control of his seven-piece band, of the enthusiastic crowd, and himself. [1]

Zappa, with his back to the audience, carefully conducted the band through the most intricate of instrumental offerings. He told the crowd when to applaud, when to sing along, when to stand up or sit down and when to keep quiet, always with striking success. He led himself through extended guitar solos while choreographing every sound with mechanized hand and body movements.

He followed the band onstage, sauntering to the center, stoically watching his fingering of the complicated guitar introduction. Dressed casually in gray double-knit pants and a white bowling shirt with "Burlington Lumber" printed on the back , the 37-year-old calmly dedicated the next song, "Dancin' Fool ," and slinked across the stage.

Who is this man? The second coming, perhaps? Zappa himself discounts this notion as hardly possible.

"Most people know me from sitting on a toilet in a picture going dooey," he said during a phone interview Tuesday afternoon.

But don't get the man wrong, there is more to him than his humorous and sometimes nonsensical lyrics suggest. He is an intellectual with strong convictions about the American way, and musically, as a composer, arranger and performer he borders on genius.

"I started writing songs at 14. I was influenced by mainly chamber music and orchestra music. I didn't write a rock 'n' roll song until I was 22.

"Americans, in general, know very little about music. They like to hear words, so I give them words — sometimes they overlook the music involved," he said.

Early in the set, Zappa removed his guitar, poured himself a cup of coffee, lit a cigarette, settled cross-legged on his stool and listened to xylophone player-percussionist Ed Mann play a snappy, jazzlike improvisation. As if conducting an audition, Zappa bowed his head and nodded before giving Mann the thumb-forefinger OK sign and directing keyboardist Tom [Mars] to do his solo.

Announcing that "corruption and perversion are the cornerstones of the American way of life," Zappa continued the set with a mockery of Peter Frampton's "I'm In You," calling his version "I Have Been In You." The song flowed gracefully with the band's precise orchestration and accomplished what Zappa intended — a perfect mockery of rock 'n' roll hype.

"I hate hype," he said bluntly. "I don't go in for press releases at all — that's why I choose to confront the world by giving my own interviews — like this one. I can't see letting someone else talk for me."

Immediately, the band broke into the sound-effect laden "Don't Eat the Yellow Snow-St. Alphonso's Pancake Breakfast" side from Zappa's "Apostrophe " album. Zappa

commanded the audience to stand up at the outset of the number, telling them to sit down after two minutes of constant cheering. Again, mockery played a big part in Zappa's side comments to the crowd, this time "druggies with their downers and alcohol" and "Jesus freaks" receiving the brunt of his social comment.

"I don't go to parties — they 're too predictable. I'm not a social person, I'm not interested in watching people do things they'll regret later. People think I'm drugoriented because they believe that to be creative, a person must be chemically oriented. Well. I think most doctors, lawyers and politicians are chemically oriented. People that drink and do drugs use it as an excuse to do things that are stupid," Zappa charged.

His tirade continued.

"Religion is bad for your mental health, it makes people dependent and emotional cripples. It creates neurosis in people. There would be no sin unless religion was there to manufacture it. "

The 40-minute encore began with two new songs, probably from Zappa's soon to be released "Martian Love Songs." Zappa was content to conduct (wand and all) his band through "Bamboozled by Love ," a straight forward rock 'n' roll number featuring an excellent performance by slide guitarist Doug Walley.

Like a TV evangelist, Zappa led the audience in a philosophizing chant: "Information is not knowledge, knowledge is not wisdom, wisdom is not truth, truth is not love, love is not music because music is the best." The crowd was into it — Zappa had complete control.

All that remained were speeded up versions of two Zappa favorites, "Dinah Mo Hum " and "Camarillo Brillo." The music was hurried and Zappa and the band seemed only to be appeasing the crowd's desire for familiar music rather than striving for perfection as they had done elsewhere throughout the show.

Absent from the program were selections from Zappa's most recent Warner Brothers release ,"Studio Tan." He explained the void in the afternoon interview.

"I delivered four tapes to Warner last March as our contract specified and they released this one without telling me. I have received no advance or no royalties from Warner. I consider it a bootleg or pirate album and I'm suing the record company in California. I've broken off with Warner and am now with Phonogram Records."

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1. Concert in September 19, 1978, in Columbus, Ohio, as a part of world tour. This concert was taped and setlist was: The Deathless Horsie, Dancin' Fool, Easy Meat, Honey Don't You Want A Man Like Me?, Keep It Greasey, Bobby Brown, Conehead, Mo's Vacation, The Black Page, I Have Been In You, Flakes, Magic Fingers, Yellow Snow Suite, Bamboozled By Love, Sy Borg, Little House I Used To Live In, Dinah-Moe Humm, Camarillo Brillo, Muffin Man, Strictly Genteel. (FZshows)

A Conversation With Frank Zappa

By Dave Rothman
Oui, April, 1979

Everybody thinks he's locked the Sixties, but the Grandaddy of FM radio is bigger now than ever. If you liked freaking out with Suzy Creamcheese and cruisin' for burgers with Ruben & the Jets, wait'll you meet Sheik Yer Bouti.

Zappa. The name alone triggers a cranial video replay of the Sixties, like a grenade fragment from the Stateside Nam lodged in our consciousness. He was the furry, underground guitarist with no commercial potential who defined the word freak; the rock 'n' roller with brains who exposed everything that was phony about the American dream – all the stuff we figured out ourselves (not quite so concisely) when we were stoned.

So where is Frank now that everybody is doin' the disco-self-help-Perrier two-step?

Guess.

His latest album, Sheik Yer Bouti, demonstrates that Zappa can emulsify more than one decade (he already skewered the Sixties with We're Only in It for the Money, and he knuckle-sandwiched the Fifties on Cruisin' with Ruben & the Jets). Zappa's been at it for 15 years, playing rock, jazz, blues, R&B – you name it. And while critics continue to identify him with the Woodstock Generation, he's reaching more people today than ever before.

And he still plays like a Mother.

Zappa's stature as composer, producer, guitarist, songwriter, social satirist and filmmaker easily dwarfs the competition. Now, fed up with playing musical turntables with the record companies, he's filed a multimillion-dollar lawsuit against Warner Bros. and established his own label. Meet Frank Zappa, businessman.

OUI sent correspondent Dave Rothman out to capture the unique perspective of this perennial performer. Rothman reports:

"I caught Zappa during a week's layover at the Royal Biscayne Hotel in Key Biscayne, Florida. He and his band, now known as Zappa, were resting after a sojourn in Europe, where they played a string of festivals.

"People close to Zappa told me there was a good chance he could be diagnosed as manic-depressive if 'they' ever got a chance to look at him. There was no way I could know if he'd have the patience to give me one minute or one hour. Expect anything, they said. Radical mood swing is the core of Zappa's personality – and no doubt the core of his creativity as well.

“When I knocked on Frank’s door, he opened it with the slightest possible shred of acknowledgment. No handshake. I knew immediately where his mood swing was at the moment – several fathoms below sea level. That long black cloud was down and was there to stay for the duration of our first interview. His disdain for the ‘interrogation,’ as he called it, remained obvious. On our next encounter, the cloud disappeared and Zappa lightened up, rapping casually with fans who wandered in, and generally enjoying himself. Surprisingly, the results of both sessions were somehow consistent: Laced in with Zappa’s unrelenting cynicism, the hilarity was always there – regardless of what mood he was in. The only difference seemed to be whether or not he was laughing.

“ ‘Did he try to intimidate you?’ his people asked me afterwards.

“ ‘Of course,’ I replied. ‘That was the fun part.’ ”

OUI: How have you managed to survive in the rock-music business for so long?

ZAPPA: First thing you do is you don’t stop. Second thing you do is you keep going.

OUI: Many people seem to think of you as a Sixties phenomenon. Does that ever bother you?

ZAPPA: They’ll still be saying the same thing in 1990. The year 2000 will come around and I’ll still be on the road, and they’ll be saying, “He was happening back in ‘67, ‘68 ...” Our audience increases by twenty percent every year.

OUI: Why?

ZAPPA: Because Americans aren’t as stupid as people think they are. Somebody goes to a concert and likes it and tells his friends; and the next year we come back to that town and the audience is bigger. Everything else that’s being written about rock-’n’-roll acts in America today is generated by record-company hype. Hype is when a company sends out somebody or a piece of paper that makes claims about an event that aren’t true. I do it the old-fashioned way. I sit here and do interviews in person and tell you what’s going on. I take complete responsibility for what happens. If anything goes wrong, it’s my fault. It’s like running a candy store.

OUI: What groups have you been listening to in the past five years?

ZAPPA: I don’t pay much attention to groups.

OUI: Individuals?

ZAPPA: I heard a violinist in Europe who I thought was really excellent. His name is L. Shankar. He’s been working with John McLaughlin. But most of what’s in rock ’n’ roll today is company-manufactured background music. Most of it is swill designed to reinforce the various lifestyles of those market segments that buy whatever type of music you’re talking about.

OUI: How long ago did you come to that conclusion?

ZAPPA: When I was born.

OUI: What's happening with your lawsuit against Warner Bros.?

ZAPPA: Same thing that happens with all lawsuits. You wait for your day in court. In California it's three to five years in a civil suit. I'm sure I'll go to court, and whatever decision is rendered, either side will appeal. We'll probably be in court for twenty or thirty years.

OUI: What's at stake?

ZAPPA: Oh, twenty million dollars.

OUI: What does the suit involve?

ZAPPA: A nice person, who is me, versus a bunch of assholes, which include all the people involved in the suit. Very simply, I lived up to the terms of my contract with Warner Bros. I delivered four albums to them. My contract says that when I give them the albums, they give me the money. They didn't give me the money; they didn't give me the royalties; they've already released two of the live albums I delivered [Live in New York and Studio Tan]; and they're getting ready to release another one. They haven't paid me and they don't have publishing licenses for the songs.

OUI: How do they expect to be able to get away with that?

ZAPPA: Because they're a multimillion-dollar company with lawyers coming out their assholes, and because nobody would ever presume that a company that size would need to do anything like that. I'm sure it goes on every day, I bet there are other artists who they squeeze the same way and just fuck around with, and who don't stand up to it or aren't crazy enough to do battle with them. One of the biggest problems is finding a law firm that'll take 'em on. I've already been through four law firms.

OUI: Obviously, you think you'll win.

ZAPPA: Well, yeah. Don't the good guys always win?

OUI: I'm not sure.

ZAPPA: Well, if you had your choice between taking your chances and fighting, or just saying, "Well, forget it," what would you do? It just pisses me off. I don't like to be taken advantage of. Not by Warner Bros. or my former manager or his brother, the attorney, or any of those people. I resent it. You know, people are basically shitty. It's when they prove it over and over again that it gets obnoxious.

OUI: Is that your philosophy about people in general?

ZAPPA: Yeah.

OUI: Have you always thought that?

ZAPPA: Yeah.

OUI: What about yourself?

ZAPPA: I’m fantastic. Fantastic and honest and wonderful.

OUI: And everybody else is shitty?

ZAPPA: That‘s right. Until they prove different. But I ain’t holding my breath.

OUI: Can you tell us about your new film, Baby Snakes?

ZAPPA: That’s one possible title. The other possible ones are Gas Mask and Martian Love Secrets.

OUI: Why those titles?

ZAPPA: They’re good titles. What’s in a title? Wanna call it Number One?

OUI: What is the film about?

ZAPPA: It‘s about ... ummm ... ideas.

OUI: What ideas?

ZAPPA: Various ideas.

OUI: How would it compare with 200 Motels?

ZAPPA: It’s not the same.

OUI: Can’t you say any more about it?

ZAPPA: No.

OUI: You have to keep it secret?

ZAPPA: No.

OUI: You just don’t want to talk about it.

ZAPPA: Right.

OUI: Is there anything you do want to talk about?

ZAPPA: Anything you want.

OUI: Is it true that a radio station in L.A. played one of your songs recently and got into some sort of censorship trouble because of an obscenity ruling?

ZAPPA: I don’t know anything about it. I don’t see why they should pick on my material. They should listen to some of the disco records that are out.

OUI: Do you hate disco?

ZAPPA: No, not at all. It's well suited for the purpose it was designed for.

OUI: Which is?

ZAPPA: To provide a rhythmic accompaniment for the activities of people who wish to gain access to each other for potential future reproduction.

OUI: You think somebody sat down and thought that out?

ZAPPA: I think that's the bottom line. It doesn't have much to do with music and it's got a lot to do with sociology. Take a social climate that's as restrictive as the American social climate is toward sex and everything else that's any good, and people have to find ways to do things that they feel are natural. Disco music, and the places that dispense it, provide a setting and a facility where you can carry out those activities. It's like a playground.

OUI: How does that differ from a rock-music audience?

ZAPPA: I don't think people go to concerts in a hockey rink for the same reason that people go to discotheques. I don't see manifestations of the same activities taking place. It's possible that people go there to meet their friends and eventually go off and get laid. I don't think that usually happens at a concert in a hockey rink, but that is what they're interested in when they go to a discotheque. I have trouble believing that going there to dance is the real reason why people go, especially when you watch the body language involved in the dancing.

OUI: How would you translate that body language?

ZAPPA: It's different with each customer. Mostly it's people who are tense and have emotional problems, seeking assistance from whatever source is nearby.

OUI: Couldn't that qualify just about everybody?

ZAPPA: Being tense and having emotional problems is one thing, but being tense, having emotional problems and manifesting them on a twinkling dance floor, wearing special clothes, is a different story. You can be tense and anxious for free. But to go there and pay, and jog while you're doing it, is a different story. That either exemplifies a special need for attention from a certain segment of the population, or it's a very special act of desperation. I've always been fond of music with a good beat. [Flash of a cynical smile]

OUI: What does that say about the Seventies and maybe the Eighties – the fact that disco is happening now and wasn't happening ten years ago?

ZAPPA: It's been around for a long time; it's just that people finally caught onto it and figured out how to use it. We live in a very special time right now. At no other time in history has there been such mass disillusionment in terms of reliance on governing functions. Most people don't want to come to terms with that. It's been proven over and over again that the emperor isn't wearing any clothes, but most people don't like to look at naked emperors. In the process of turning around to avert their eyes, they saw the discotheques and a few other things and latched onto them.

OUI: Do you feel the urge to change society at all?

ZAPPA: No, because there's no reason to assume that my idea of what's better would really be better. I resent it when other people try to inflict their ideas of betterness on me. I don't think they know. And I can't see any authority on the horizon that's got any answers that seem worthwhile. Most of the things that are suggested are probably detrimental to your mental health.

OUI: Like what?

ZAPPA: These fake religions, for one. I think they're really bad. But what can you say? Some people think that running is spectacular; I think it's stupid. Other people think that tennis is where it's at; I think that's stupid. The rest of 'em wanna join est or be Scientologists and I think that's all stupid. But I'm not saying I'm the only one who knows; I'm saying that, for me, it's totally wrong. Considering the way I live. I just don't have any use for it. But if somebody asks me how I feel, there's no reason why I shouldn't tell him. I think that stuff is stupid.

OUI: Have you ever tried running or tennis?

ZAPPA: I used to play tennis when I was a kid, and I ran when I was in grammar school. Now I tour. It's more challenging and more fatiguing than all of the above enterprises combined.

OUI: Do you think there are any true religions? Are there any that you look at and say: Those people aren't being misled?

ZAPPA: Organized religions by their very natures are misleading. The bottom line is always money. What that's got to do with your spiritual well-being still eludes me. It's always the bucks, no matter how they disguise it. If you need that sort of assistance to keep yourself together, you may be paying a higher rate to a fake religion than you would to a psychotherapist. Which is not to say that a psychotherapist is going to give you any better value per dollar either. If you're going to deal with reality, you're going to have to make one big discovery: Reality is something that belongs to you as an individual. If you wanna grow up, which most people don't, the thing to do is take responsibility for your own reality and deal with it on your own terms. Don't expect that because you pay some money to somebody else or take a pledge or join a club or run down the street or wear a special bunch of clothes or play a certain sport or even drink Perrier water, it's going to take care of everything for you. Because it all comes from inside. As a matter of fact, that's where it stays.

OUI: How old were you when you figured that out?

ZAPPA: About eighteen.

OUI: How?

ZAPPA: I kept looking for results. When you're a kid, your parents have recommendations for what they think you should do with your life, and they guide you to the best of their abilities. They make suggestions, and if you're intelligent, you test the results against the things they suggest. If you keep drawing blanks, you better do something else. My father wanted me to go into engineering. My mother just wanted me to stay out of trouble. Pretty normal. That's what happens to most kids.

OUI: Do you care what they think now?

ZAPPA: My father's dead and I don't know what my mother thinks. She's a nice person and everything, but even if she completely hated what I was doing. it wouldn't make any difference. Because I don't do it for her.

OUI: That's not as easy for some people.

ZAPPA: You can't spend the rest of your life waiting around for your parents to say, "What a good kid." What're they gonna do, give you an extra cookie? The more we progress into the robot age, who's to say that the values of the parents who have been cranking out generation after generation of unhappy little persons ... who's to say that their values are anything to aspire to, anyway?

Even if you had all the certification in the world, would that make any difference? Certification from one source or another seems to be the most important thing to people all over the world. A piece of paper from a school that says you're smart, a pat on the head from your parents that says you're good or some reinforcement from your peers that makes you think what you're doing is worthwhile. People are just waiting around to get certified.

OUI: What are people lacking that makes them need that certification?

ZAPPA: Let's look at it very carefully. The lifestyle that I have is probably neither desirable nor useful to most people. Most people are probably better off getting the certification they desire and spindling their lives away the way they're doing. I don't think they'd enjoy living any other way. There are millions of people who acquire all sorts of wonderful feelings from watching a football game and drinking a bottle of beer. It makes them really happy. Doesn't do shit for me. But for them it's life itself. As long as they can believe in the beer and the football, then they've really got something. And it's probably more useful to them than religion. So why take it away? Why tell them what's really going on? Let 'em be happy.

OUI: But that's what you've been doing for fifteen years – telling people how bad things are.

ZAPPA: If a person wants to write music and lyrics, he has a perfect right to express his views on a certain subject. I would feel wrong if I were to express anything that I didn't believe in. I write what I like to write. Those who like to listen to it, listen to it. And the ones who don't, watch football and drink beer, jog, go to discos and so forth. I never claimed to be a man for all seasons. After all, I'm merely a 1960s phenomenon. When you're trapped in the Sixties like I am, it's real hard to deal with the future. It's like yelling through the wall of the time capsule of your reader's mind.

OUI: Do you ever feel a sense of power from having reached so many people over such a long period of time?

ZAPPA: I don't think I've reached that many people. Shit, Barry Manilow reaches more than anybody, doesn't he? Do you think he has a sense of power? Is it manifested by white clothing? Just because somebody hears something you say, or reads something that you write, doesn't mean you've reached them. With reading comprehension being what it is in the U. S., you can safely toss that one out the window. If you want to judge by the

listening habits of people who buy records, the first thing they do is put it on and talk over it. To most people, the album is the cover. The cover tells them how to interpret the audile contents. The record is used as background music to support the lifestyle of the person who buys it. If they're upwardly mobile, they might go for a little fusion music or Barry Manilow. If they're laid back, they might go for something else. Records are collected as artifacts to support their certification.

OUI: Are you concerned whether or not anyone out there really listens to your music and really cares about what you're saying?

ZAPPA: I can't care. It's impossible to care. How do you care for something that doesn't exist? It can't exist because there's no one who could hear what I do who has any idea of what went into it and what it really means and what it really says. Statistically, the odds are just too great. There's no way that they could comprehend it. Not because I'm so far out, but because there isn't a mechanism for comprehending what happens when a person writes a piece of music and goes through the whole process of getting it onto a record, to the time it finally gets into the home and gets played on God-knows-what equipment. So much gets lost in the translation. Even if you sat there listening to it with a microscope, there's no way you're gonna find out what it means.

OUI: You're talking ideally, as a perfectionist ...

ZAPPA: What else is there? What are you going to settle for? Somebody tapping their foot to your song? Humming your tune? Remembering three of your words? Is that communication? Then you ask me if I should care about what takes place when the record gets into the home. People have preposterous ideas about what those songs are about and what the music means. They start spouting all this shit that's so far off the mark, it's revolting. But if that's how they derive pleasure, who am I to deprive them of it? Let 'em enjoy it. It's there for their edification. But total comprehension is out of the question.

OUI: Are you talking about living life on the most serious plane possible?

ZAPPA: No! How can you? Because to get really serious about everything. you'd have to know what it is, wouldn't you? You're never going to know, so forget about it.

OUI: That's not your attitude toward music.

ZAPPA: That's a different story.

OUI: Why?

ZAPPA: I can't talk to you about music because you don't know anything about music. I can talk to you about politics or sociology and all that peripheral stuff. but I can't talk to you about music. There's not enough information in common that I could say to you so you'd be able to understand. Besides, the people who read OUI don't give a fuck about music anyway. They're very lifestyle oriented. That's probably why your editor was afraid to talk to somebody who was trapped in the Sixties, because somebody who's lifestyle oriented has to be totally up to date. Otherwise, the clothing industry would fall apart; the charts wouldn't mean anything. High school really did a lot of damage to the American mentality. So much of what you see passing for real life today is just an extension of the desire in high school to be a cool person. that other kind of certification.

OUI: We have high school, but every other culture has some form of transition from childhood to supposed adulthood.

ZAPPA: Go to Europe and check it out over there. The whole cool-person syndrome is nothing like what's happening here. The cool-person syndrome is peculiarly American. Part of that has to do with the way the educational business is run in the U. S. It's not based on how much you can teach your child: it's based on how much money the suppliers of basic materials can make off your child. Somewhere along the line most people pick up the desire to be a cool person, which is just another way to make them buy things. Once you've decided that you need to be a cool person, it makes you a possible victim of anyone whose products are the equivalent of bottled smoke. Somebody tells you to buy this particularly useless item and you'll be a cool person. No matter how stupid it seems, you have to buy it. Pet Rocks. Pringle's potato chips. whatever it is – the newest, the latest. Since the cool-person thing is something you learn in school, and since the school business is pretty suspicious and definitely tied up with the government, it makes you wonder whether or not the desire to be cool is part of a government plot to make you buy stupid things. Of course, this is all neither here nor there. These things will all be taken care of when Nixon gets back. I wouldn't be surprised if the American people elected him President again.

OUI: If being a cool person is totally an American syndrome, how and why did it happen here?

ZAPPA: You're assuming that all nations of the world are on an equal footing with the U.S. in terms of cultural development. The U.S. is a mere pup tent of a civilization. We've got two hundred years of stupidity behind us and we think we're right up there with everyone else who's been doing it for thousands of years.

OUI: We've got more money and power than anyone else ...

ZAPPA: In some regards. The U.S. is one of the few places where people can afford to be as hedonistic as they are.

OUI: Do you ever feel guilty being a part of that?

ZAPPA: I'm not a part of it. I'm merely a citizen. I resent every tax dollar I have to spend to support it.

OUI: But you're still a part of it.

ZAPPA: What do you mean? Just because I went through the meat grinder doesn't mean they got me.

OUI: But you do pay taxes and you are living in the Royal Biscayne.

ZAPPA: See anything royal about this Biscayne? Have you noticed the wallpaper? So this is the Royal Biscayne. Do you think I'd be more moral if I lived in a fleabag hotel?

OUI: But the fact remains that anyone living in the U.S. has more opportunities than he would have anywhere else.

ZAPPA: Someone in the U.S. would find it pretty hard to get a good education. But then, what good is an education? The richest people in the world aren't particularly smart or happy. And the happiest people in the world aren't particularly smart or rich.

OUI: So where does that leave you?

ZAPPA: That leaves me making music. But we can't talk about that.

OUI: We can't even talk about my partial comprehension of it?

ZAPPA: No, because that would lead to misconstructions, or misconstrusions, if you prefer. Besides, you don't wanna talk about my music. It's trapped in the Sixties. It's a little time capsule that's not supposed to be opened for another couple hundred years.

OUI: Do you treat the people who are closest to you differently than the people you do business with?

ZAPPA: I don't have any close people. I have a wife and three kids.

OUI: How close are they?

ZAPPA: They're my best friends, the only friends I got.

OUI: Is everything else business?

ZAPPA: Yeah. The people in my family are the only people I know that I don't have to give a paycheck to.

OUI: What do you try to teach your children?

ZAPPA: Nothing.

OUI: Then how do you see yourself as a father?

ZAPPA: We just hang out. They have very fixed ideas about who they are and what they want to be and how the world works. We very seldom discuss it. They have their own realities. Looks pretty good to me. But I'm no judge of anyone else's reality, of course.

OUI: What if it didn't look good to you?

ZAPPA: I'd probably rant and rave. But that's only because it's probably a biological urge. Occasionally if I see them fighting I tell them they're acting like a bunch of jerks. Everybody wants to be a cool person, so that usually works.

OUI: What is your relationship with your wife like?

ZAPPA: We've been married eleven or twelve years. I guess we get along pretty good.

OUI: Is she close to your music?

ZAPPA: As close as she could be. She doesn't write it, but she's in the house when it's being written. So there is that proximity factor. She's no Linda McCartney, if you get the drift.

OUI: Do you do anything that has nothing to do with music?

ZAPPA: No. Everything on this planet has something to do with music. Music functions in the realm of sculptured air. Polluted as our atmosphere might be. air is the thing that makes music work. Since all other things that occur in the sound domain are transmitted to the ear through that swirling mass, depending on how wide you want to make your definition, you could perceive quite a bit of human experience in terms of music. You could listen to a traffic jam and figure out if it was a good composition. There's the other extreme. Music on paper is the same as food when it's a recipe. A score for a symphony is a recipe for a sound sculpture. Conversely, you could look at a piece of a score and see organizations of notes on the page. You can look at any other piece of visual material, and if you squint at it a little, you could see a score there. Like this wallpaper could be a score, maybe – for a disco beat.

OUI: David Walley, in his biography of you, called No Commercial Potential: The Saga of Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, says that you will turn anything into music if you think it will work well.

ZAPPA: David Walley is a tragic case. Here's a guy who wanted to be a writer and came to me with the idea that he'd like to do a biography of me. I said, "I don't want a biography." He says. "I've already made a deal with a publisher and I'm going to do it whether you submit to the interviews or not." I say. "Oh, shit, what am I gonna do. I don't know if this guy can write." But at that time, he was a fan of ours and used to follow us around. So I had to make the decision whether or not to do the interviews. I had to decide whether or not I wanted a so-called biography on the market. So I did a few interviews with him. He would show up at my house with a girl. He probably said to her. "Come with me. baby. I'm goin' over to interview Zappa." Then he would ask me a question. I'd start to answer it and he'd start talking about his father in military school. I had a couple of nights of this. I played him a couple tapes. you know. This guy was really a case. So he goes off and writes this book. Then he sends me some galley proofs at a point when ten thousand copies of the book have already been printed and are sitting in the warehouse. The galleys were just ridiculous. There were such inaccuracies. He sold a lot of copies, but as reference material for who I am and what I'm about, I would say it's not too reliable. At least when he did one about Ernie Kovacs, he couldn't really hurt Ernie because Ernie's dead. People even stick that fuckin' thing in my face and tell me they want me to autograph it. As you can see, I have very little regard for people in the writing profession.

OUI: Did it mean anything to you when Ralph Gleason called you a "contemporary philosopher"?

ZAPPA: Ralph Gleason also called the Mothers a "Sunset Boulevard version of the Fugs." So what can I say? Does it mean anything when people say things about you? Don't mean shit. It's all little drops of ink on little pieces of paper that're meant to be sold. They blow with the wind. Somebody from a record company gives him a nickel and he writes something positive for a change. That business is so fake. If you think the record business is bad. all the support systems for it are really obnoxious.

OUI: Like punk merchandising?

ZAPPA: The record business thrives on trends. We can't wait around for The Beatles to get back together again; we've got to get some new act going real quick. A boutique owner puts together a bunch of guys off the street, sticks safety pins in their faces, gets the new line of clothing together and presto – we have a musical trend. As soon as one guy gets a record contract and a few things appear in the papers, twenty other groups form along the same lines and it looks like that's what the record companies are buying. The record companies do buy it and, in order to make it look like a real trend, they start giving little presents to people who write for papers and magazines. A few more articles come out talking about the trend. Trend is then manufactured and put out on the street where all the cool people have to find out what it's all about. Whether they like it or not, they buy the clothes. They get the safety pins. The market gets totally saturated, the trend dies out and a new trend comes in – right off the assembly line. Just another example of post-Beatlemania desperation.

OUI: What do you think of shows like Beatlemania – or Janis & Jimi, which closed shortly after it opened?

ZAPPA: Nostalgia merchandising. These people are really trapped in the Sixties. You see, the record companies are gradually being taken over by accountants. Puds out of college that get certified as economically smart. They count out boxes of records and when they see that a certain type of thing is moving more units than another, they apply pressure to the executives, who then invest in that direction and drop anything that's not on the same profit level. So, if there was ever an aesthetic decision to be made at an executive level, it's gone now.

OUI: Is that why you've started your own record company?

ZAPPA: That's one reason. The other is that it gives me more equity in what's going on.

OUI: Do you think there's anything detrimental about having blatant sex in music as opposed to implied eroticism?

ZAPPA: Depends on what you call erotic. You really think there's anything erotic in today's music? Eroticism of a class variety is absent from American culture. What passes for eroticism in America is really pretty corny. But then again, there's not much else in the culture that's fine grain, if you know what I mean. It's a pretty coarse culture.

OUI: Would you like to try to make it fine grain?

ZAPPA: Not necessarily. I don't think that's my function. That's like going to the North Pole and trying to find a French restaurant.

OUI: So what is your function?

ZAPPA: I just do what I do. Sit in my l960s time capsule and do my job.

OUI: Do you think there's anything detrimental about music getting more pornographic?

ZAPPA: Give me an example of pornographic music. Make sure you include all the latest Supreme Court interpretations for what "pornographic" means. Show me how pornographic music can exist; then differentiate it from erotic, and then ask me the

question again. Personally, I think Indian music is quite erotic, very seductive. Some good shit there. Glandular. It's nice. You're not talking about any of the Eagles' records, are you? You wouldn't be talking about Stay, by Jackson Browne, which you must admit – is getting pornographic. If you've heard the original, you know that Jackson Browne's version is getting there. You know where he says, "The roadies don't mind"? Know what that means. don't you? Hey, huh. He's slippin' it in there, boy. A lot of people would be hardened by such a thing. Then you can take things like that Prudential commercial on TV: There it was! Like a rock!

OUI: Have you been asked any intelligent questions lately?

ZAPPA: No. I don't think questions are particularly intelligent anyway. The only ones that seem to matter are: What time is the plane? Where is the men's room? What time do we go on? These are the important matters of the day. Everything else is an exchange of little pieces of partial comprehension.

OUI: So you don't see any value in talking about art or philosophy or social satire?

ZAPPA: If it sells magazines, it's valuable. If it doesn't, what is it? Of course, you'd have to go a long way to beat the text of this Perrier ad [pointing to a book called Leisureguide, on the back of which is a full-color ad for Perrier water. his eyes suddenly beaming]. I like the part about the "delicate gases ... trapped over one hundred and forty million years ago in the volcanic eruptions of the Cretaceous era ... are released and rise through porous limestone and cracked marls to add natural life and sparkle to the icy waters of a single stream." This guy's got a good racket. That's bottled smoke. And you are cool if you drink it! And of course here it says "no calories." But those delicate gases of dinosaur rot ... It's not often that you see something that fine. Then there are ads for women's cosmetics. Any woman who buys one of those products because of all that's written in those ads is ... hurting. You know – kinda young, kinda wild, Charlie.

OUI: Have you read any contemporary poetry?

ZAPPA: I don't read much at all. I just stick to the important stuff. I divide my time between Perrier ads and Scientific American.

OUI: What do you get out of Scientific American?

ZAPPA: One issue had this centerspread with this incredibly worded ad for a pinball machine; it was really exceptional. It had a text that was designed to appeal to the inquiring scientific mind, stating how this would be a useful artifact to have in your scientific home – you smart person, you, who subscribes to this wonderful magazine. You can be a scientific cool person with a pinball machine. Why wade through mediocre stuff? Go right to the heart of what's brilliant in America. Go for the advertising copy, since that's where the action is. So much skill and so much science goes into those little raps.

OUI: You might appreciate a small book of poetry called The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, or one called Crow, by Ted Hughes.

ZAPPA: I don't usually gravitate in that direction. That's serious shit, written by people who have things to say. I can only comprehend that stuff partially, so I stick to Perrier ads. I think I comprehend that ad pretty well. There's only one thing better than reading Perrier ads. That's watching people order it in restaurants, savoring its delicate gas bouquets.

Right away you know the people who drink that stuff are into tennis. They're healthy; they probably run a little bit, drink Perrier, get up and start the cycle again. And when they're not doing that, they're snorting cocaine. These people are truly modern. These people aren't trapped in the Sixties, no way. They're trapped in the future.

OUI: Would you consider writing a serious love song?

ZAPPA: Not for myself, not for my group.

OUI: Why not?

ZAPPA: It just wouldn't be right. What passes for hamburgers in this country is pretty preposterous. So you can carry that to the extreme and say that what passes for love in this country is pretty preposterous.

OUI: Where is there a better attitude?

ZAPPA: You got me. You really stumped me on that one.

OUI: Are you afraid of getting old?

ZAFPA: I'm already old. I was born old. Doesn't scare me at all. I had a mustache when I was eleven. What's so great about being young? You don't have any rights: people poop on you all the time.

OUI: Is there anything you liked about the Fifties?

ZAPPA: I think the music of the Fifties is really good. I suspect it's much better musically than much of what's available now. Not in terms of production, but in terms of content. One good believable song about some guy's girlfriend and how they broke up – a sincere one – is better than twenty albums of English rock that's ever been produced. Or better than one hundred albums of laid-back L.A. studio acoustic-guitar swill. Did you ever hear Edna, by the Medallions?

OUI: No.

ZAPPA: Well. You haven't lived yet, have you? How about Can I Come Over Tonight, by the Velours? That's art music, there.

OUI: When was the last time you cried?

ZAPPA: Two or three months ago.

OUI: What about?

ZAPPA: Must've been some movie on TV. If something wants to come out of my eyes. I let it come out. If it wants to stay in there, I don't squeeze it out. There are certain things that make water come out of my eyes that are irrational. I'm not a terminal weeper or anything like that.

OUI: Do you ever worry that you might be too rational?

ZAPPA: No.

OUI: Does anybody ever say that about you?

ZAPIA: No. Most people don't think I'm rational. They're too busy featuring their hurt. They find it irrational not to feature your hurt. That's how fucked up they are.

OUI: Don't you feature your hurt?

ZAPPA: No.

OUI: What about a song like Trouble Comin' Every Day? Or a song like The Torture Never Stops?

ZAPPA: That's not my hurt. That's a commentary. That's about as close to featuring your hurt as writing an article for a newspaper on world conditions. That's journalism.

OUI: Is your music close to journalism?

ZAPPA: Some of it. It's pretty biased journalism, but I don't mind that. Until they modify the Constitution, I can say whatever the fuck I want about these subjects. And if I happen to be rational, then that's just too bad.

OUI: Why is your group just called Zappa I now?

ZAPPA: Because it's not really the Mothers of Invention; so why call it the Mothers of Invention? Why be trapped in the Sixties? Know what I mean? It's a good name. Two syllables, not too taxing. It looks good in print and it happens to be my real name.

OUI: Would you ever want to go into TV?

ZAPPA: Sure. Talk show. We tried it one time, but the mentality of the people who allow things to get on TV is, well ... they weren't too favorable about putting me on the tube. They do it all by computer, just like in the movie business. They have computer printouts of what Mr. X's name means in terms of dollars at the box office. They've figured out which personalities will attract the most viewers. They also have a list of people they don't want to have on TV. And my name's on that list! Remember. TV is only an extension of the government. They're not just there to sell you soap; they're there to make people believe all the rest of the shit that's going on.

OUI: Do you really think they're intelligent enough to put together a conspiracy like that?

ZAPPA: They're intelligent enough to try, but in order to make it work ... that's a problem sometimes. Look at every country in the world that has TV. Some countries are obvious about TV being government-owned and operated. In the U.S., TV pretends to be free, but it's completely government dominated. In the same way that a President or member of Congress can use the IRS to apply pressure to an individual citizen, they have networks that have X number of stations or independents that are all tied together and they're all under pressure by the government to keep things the way they are. You don't want to rock the boat or you ain't gonna have an FCC license.

OUI: So how much do you want to rock the boat?

ZAPPA: No more than is rational. The important thing to remember about the boat is that it's supposed to go someplace.

OUI: How could young people these days make things better?

ZAPPA: There are several positive steps that have to be taken. First, you have to get rid of the Electoral College. Until then, your vote doesn't really mean much when it comes to electing the big stuff. The other thing you have to do is reinstate the write-in vote. That way, if you know somebody who's really cool. you could write in and make him a candidate. Then you're not gonna be stuck with freeze-dried candidates.

The other way would be not to get so ripped all the time. It's not gonna do me any good to say: Drugs are the work of the devil! I won't stop people from getting loaded, but I don't think it's productive to stay loaded all the time and just disappear into Fantasyland. People stay so loaded that, after a while, they don't know that things suck.

OUI: Do you think they're happy?

ZAPPA: I don't know. That's not my world. But they walk around bumping into things, pretending they're having a wonderful time. There hasn't been a drug invented yet that's as good as sex. If they ever come up with one like that, naturally that's going to make a great dent in the birth-control situation.

OUI: Is your sex life as weird as your music?

ZAPPA: What makes you think my music is weird?

OUI: Just a preconception that many of us have.

ZAPPA: First of all, you have to get rid of your preconceptions. You're talking to a human being who happens to be pretty intelligent, who works real hard to do what he does – and there's nothing weird about that at all. Remember, I'm rational. I think you're weird. What's weird about my music? As an accurate journalist and a person with a conscience, it's your job to bring the truth to the people of the world. There isn't anything weird about my music. Weird is a skeleton in the closet, wearing a rubber mask with warts all over its nose, and all that kind of shit. That's not what I do. The thing that makes my music unusual is that people only hear one kind of music all the time over the radio. It's wallpaper to their lives. Audile wallpaper. There's one acceptable beat and there are three acceptable chord progressions. There are five acceptable words: baby, love, tears, yat yat. Just because I don't deal in those terms doesn't mean I'm weird. So tell these people: I ain't weird; I'm rational. I'm a person who can choose to write stuff like that, or choose to write stuff that includes all the notes on the piano played at once, followed by a cement truck driving over the piano, followed by a small atomic explosion. Nothing weird about that as long as you do it in a meaningful way.

OUI: Have you done anything interesting while you've been here in Florida?

ZAPPA: The other night we were out cruising in the limo when we passed a place that had a sign out front saying war T-SHIRT NITE, so all the guys went "Arrreeeyarrrghhh!" We go in and there's one hundred guys and three girls and a couple of barmaids and a band. There were a couple people dancing. We sit down and have a couple drinks. Pretty soon

the place starts filling up and the band starts playing. Then they announce the wet T-shirt contest. They have some guy who's the M.C., and in order to prove he's really a cool guy and not merely an M.C., naturally he has to join in with the band and sing a couple Elvis Presley numbers. Well, a-one for the money and all that shit. He had one of those Bible-person haircuts that looks like it's made out of chewing gum and it's real neat around your ears and sort of poofy up front – the Jehovah's Witness look. The Bible cut. He has on a Marine sportcoat. After he sings his numbers, with a flourish and a drum roll, it's time for the contest. They have these five girls: Big C from Boston; a skinny dark-skinned-nationality-type girl; then there's this large girl with blonde hair; then there's this girl who's shaped like a huge tomato, who introduces herself as the good fairy from Never-Never Land; then, last but not least, there's this girl from California with the classic dumb-blonde look. Classic. Couldn't dance. Nice tits. Shapely body. Everybody thought: OK, here's the one. Meanwhile, the M.C. is making all the dumbest comments in the world. He's trying to emcee the show and come on to these chicks simultaneously. It was right on the level of va-va-vooomm!! Really stupid. They tried to drag it out as long as they could. First they do it with the "dry look." Then a break, then they're gonna do it with the "wet look." I didn't even stay for the "wet look" part, because the first part was so boring. I heard later that the dumb girl won and the big girl got booed off because she wouldn't flash her tits – she got very upset and wouldn't come out of her dressing room and tried to get out by a secret exit... It was real pathetic. I'm glad I went there or else I wouldn't have had a chance to see the phenomenon in the flesh.

OUI: Are you going to compose anything around the event?

ZAPPA: Yeah, but I don't want to get specific about the names. What I want to capture is the essence of the event. Somebody's going to win, somebody's going to lose, the M.C. is going to be a schmuck and the audience is the real star of the show. What are their motives? What do they think they're gonna get out of this? It's total desperation. I think I comprehend that event pretty good. [Zappa leads me to the door, in what seems like a genuine gesture of cordiality – none of which he's shown during the entire interview.]

ZAPPA: You ought to go swimming. Enjoy yourself.

OUI: I will; how about you?

ZAPPA: I don't swim, and the only time I enjoy myself is when I'm working. Just remember, the wallpaper goes on forever...

Zappa

By Dan Forte
Musician, August, 1979

When Frank Zappa's Mothers Of Invention released Freak Out in 1967, the reaction of most consumers was something like, "This must be some sort of joke – but I don't get it." At a time when rock music was taking itself more and more seriously and college professors were quoting Bob Dylan and the Beatles, Zappa seemed to mock everything that was sacred – including his own music. In the liner notes to that debut album, he said of "Hungry Freaks, Daddy," "This song has no message," and admitted that "Wowie Zowie" was "designed to suck the 12-year-old listener into our camp." While other groups were advocating peace and love, the Mothers would insult their audiences onstage. And they were anything but beautiful.

Few critics could have predicted then that Zappa's sensory-overload attack would become such an influential force in the musical factions which came to be known as fusion and progressive rock. Fewer still could have conceived of Zappa sustaining one of the longest, most prolific careers in the field of rock.

Thirteen years and a couple dozen albums later, Zappa is still largely misunderstood by critics as well as record buyers, and his public image is as distorted now as it was then. Tell someone you're on your way to interview Frank Zappa, and you're liable to hear: "Good luck, man; he made mincemeat out of the last guy who tried to interview him," or "See if you can score me some acid," or "Be sure and ask him about the time he ate the shit."

That last statement is in reference to one of the most widespread and long-lived rumors in rock and roll history, regarding a "gross-out" contest allegedly held onstage between Zappa and the Fugs (some accounts say Captain Beefheart), in which Frank walked away victorious after defecating onstage and then eating it. That so many fans are willing to believe such nonsense says much about the way Zappa is perceived by most people.

As for the reference to drugs, Zappa has come out in print and in song vehemently opposed to their use (he says he's smoked marihuana on maybe a couple of occasions), yet the popular consensus is, "Anyone that weird must be on something."

As for his tolerance of journalists, he will openly state that he doesn't much enjoy conducting interviews – partly because he's got more important things to do with his time, and partly because most of the rock press has not been extremely kind to him or his music. In Rolling Stone's massive Illustrated History Of Rock & Roll, Zappa rated one perfunctory paragraph in the chapter of "Art Rock," while entire chapters were devoted to such derivative acts as Rod Stewart and Creedence Clearwater Revival.

But Zappa is an interviewer's dream subject – articulate, witty, intelligent, willing to address any subject, and probably capable of turning out a better article than most of the professional journalists who write about him. After returning from Europe, where he

produced an album by Indian violinist L. Shankar, Zappa took a break from his composing regimen to conduct this interview at his home in the Hollywood Hills.

Following an obligatory handshake, Zappa flops down on the couch in his purple and green living room and awaits the first question. No small talk, no niceties – strictly business, apparently of the kind that he feels is a bothersome obligation. Things start slowly, with monosyllabic answers, as Zappa drums his fingers nervously – like Johnny Carson during an especially slow-moving Tonight Show.

It isn't until the conversation turns toward rhythm and blues that Zappa brightens up, and then his speech is animated, with italics and capital letters, exclamation points, and gestures of hand and eye. R&B was Zappa's first love, and he still views it as more than mere nostalgia. Although he was born in Baltimore, Maryland on December 21,1940, he grew up in San Diego, and went to high school there and in Lancaster, in California's Mojave Desert. As he wrote in the liner notes to Freak Out, "When I was eleven years old, I was 5'7" with hairy legs, pimples, and a mustache ... for some strange reason they'd never let me be the captain of the softball team." Zappa turned to rhythm and blues, amassing a sizable record collection and playing drums in local garage bands. Although most people perceived the Mothers' 1968 ode to the 50s. Cruising With Ruben & The Jets, as a parody of that era and musical style, it was actually a labor of love for Zappa, who had written a tune for the Penguins some years earlier, "Memories Of El Monte."

The Mothers first set up headquarters in Los Angeles, during the mid-60s, when the city was in the midst of what Zappa calls "folk-rock saturation." He recounts, "If you didn't sound like the Byrds and have a Beatle haircut, you were fucked." To use a phrase that has followed Zappa throughout his career, the Mothers of Invention had "no commercial potential." One record company executive, entering a club while the Mothers were performing "Who Are The Brain Police?," characterized them as a "rhythm and blues protest band," which was not inaccurate at that stage.

The Mothers moved operations to New York City and answered Haight-Ashbury, Sgt. Pepper's, and the whole flower power hippy movement with the 1968 release We're Only In It For The Money, which included "Flower Punk" (a take-off on "Hey Joe") and "Who Needs The Peace Corps?": "I'm hippy and I'm trippy, I'm a gypsy on my own; I'll stay a week and get the crabs, and take a bus back home. I'm really just a phony, but forgive me 'cause I'm stoned."

Before moving back to California in 1969 ("because it's expedient to the business"), the Mothers played a now-famous stint at New York's Garrick Theater, lasting several months, in which they became notorious for their onstage "atrocities," such as conducting marriages onstage, having people from the audience get up and make speeches, and their collection of props – including a stuffed giraffe rigged up to ejaculate whipped cream into the front three or four rows.

What has remained most consistent with Zappa over the years, and what has puzzled many listeners from Freak Out onward, is Zappa's acerbic sense of humor – something that is lacking in so much of today's music. Throughout his recorded catalog – and the personnel changes which have seen now-established musicians like George Duke, Jean-Luc Ponty, Ian Underwood, Sugarcane Harris, Aynsley Dunbar, Flo & Eddie, and others come and go as Zappa's music has evolved – the one constant has been Zappa's biting social commentary.

This no-holds-barred sense of humor was never more present than on his latest release, Sheik Yerbouti. Included in the album are: the story of a sexual spastic named "Bobby Brown"; a song we can all identify with called "Broken Hearts Are For Assholes"; and Zappa's single from that album, "Dancin' Fool," an irresistably hot disco number about a guy who can't dance. Also included is Zappa's answer to Peter Frampton's "I'm In You," entitled "I Have Been In You." A radio spot (which may or may not reach the airwaves) was taped for the LP, featuring Frampton himself talking over said song. "Hi, Frank," the English teen idol begins, rather nervously. "This is Peter here. I'd just like to correct you on the words. It's 'I'm in you, you are in me.' Umm, there's not too much that I can say about this ... uh, I've never really liked your music, and I don't really like this. But, if you'd had me on rhythm guitar, it would've been a hit."

Another song from the LP, "Jewish Princess," brought an edict from the Anti-Defamation League. The song includes lines such as, "I want a horny little Jewish Princess, with a garlic aroma that could level Tacoma." For some reason, the ADL took offense.

As if to show that he's not singling out any one ethnic or religious group, Frank recently went into the studio to cut his upcoming "summer single," "Catholic Girls," which is about young women of that persuasion engaging in oral sex.

Sheik Yerbouti is the debut release of the artist's own label, Zappa Records, which came into being after Zappa "played out his contract," so to speak, with DiscReet, a division of Warner Bros. Because Zappa claims he has not been paid for the four albums he delivered to fulfill his end of the Warners contract, he is now in the midst of a multi-million dollar lawsuit against Warner Bros. and former manager Herb Cohen.

In the meantime, DiscReet has released the double-live package Zappa In New York, Studio Tan, Sleep Dirt, and Orchestral Favorites in rapid succession. It is indeed unfortunate that the music is caught in the middle of this legal tug o' war, because each album lives up to Zappa's usual high artistic standards. Unfortunately, though, Zappa's usual care as to liner notes and personnel listings are nowhere to be found, and the albums look as though they were rushed onto the shelves as soon as possible. Whereas a year and a half lapse without a new album followed 1976's Zoot Allures, the market is now flooded with Zappa LPs.

Frank Zappa has been acclaimed as genius for his versatility and consistently fine art under many different guises – composer, bandleader, producer, accomplished guitarist, "low singer" extraordinaire – and now record company executive can be added to the list.

Composer is the title Zappa feels most comfortable with, and his all-encompassing attitude toward composition perhaps explains in part his huge output. "If you take this ashtray." he demonstrates, "and go like this and purposely organize the material in that ashtray, you've created a composition. And it did make some noise while I was moving it around, so that's what you heard, and of course it has an aroma – it's kind of multi-dimensional. But some force of will was applied to the object to organize it according to my personal preference. Whether it's a great composition or not remains to be argued by the great thinkers of our time. But some people would look at that and say it's merely an ashtray. But by applying your ingenuity to the thing, you can cause transcendent events to occur. When I purposely set out to organize material, that's a composition – whether I'm packing my suitcase or shuffling the stuff in an ashtray – as long as I think 'composition' while I'm doing it"

The following is an original composition by Dan Forte and Frank Zappa.

MUSICIAN: Could you explain your lawsuit with Warner Bros.?

ZAPPA: I delivered four completed albums to them almost two years ago, to fulfill my contract. I owed them four albums, so I walked in one day and said, "Here's the tapes." And they were supposed to pay me, but they never did. And I'm the one who paid to make the tapes – all the costs of the musicians, the studio time, the parts copying, the rentals of the equipment, and all the other costs of making an album. I put that all out of my bank account to produce those tapes, and they have no publishing licenses, and they haven't paid any royalties. They left me holding the bag for quite a few bucks.

MUSICIAN: Weren't you also involved in a lawsuit with M-G-M?

ZAPPA: Yes. The one with Verve [part of M-G-M] is settled, and part of the settlement is that the masters were being returned to Bizarre. But Bizarre was a partnership between Herb Cohen and myself, and because there's a lawsuit between us, we can't do anything with those masters until all the other lawsuits are straightened out. But sometime down the road all that stuff will be reissued.

MUSICIAN: What do you suggest your fans do concerning the recent Warners Bros. releases? Buy them, bootleg them, tape them, or what?

ZAPPA: Well, that's a very difficult question to answer, because no matter what I say, it's going to have some bearing on the legal outcome of the case. If I insist that they bootleg these things, Warner Bros. will come after me with another suit. And if I tell them to go and buy the records, then I'm sticking money in Warner Bros.'s pocket, which they in turn use to finance lawyers to fight me. How about, just let your conscience be your guide?

MUSICIAN: Speaking of lawsuits, I understand that the Anti-Defamation League is not thrilled about "Jewish Princess."

ZAPPA: Well, first of all, that may be true that they are not thrilled. But, second of all, who gives a fuck? Because, in the first place, the song is true. The references to the behavior patterns of the Jewish Princess-type people, I believe, are accurate. To the best of my research abilities, the things that I put into that song to describe the necessary ingredients for the existence of a Jewish Princess are accurate. Also, the song is favorable towards Jewish Princesses; I say, "I want a nasty little Jewish Princess." I don't say that Jewish Princesses suck; I say I want one in the song. Now, what do you say about a league that gets together to suppress the truth?

MUSICIAN: Is that supposed to be your defense case if this comes to court?

ZAPPA: What are they going to take me to court for? That's preposterous! Sure, take me to court.

MUSICIAN: People have been taken to court for a lot less. You don't see the Frito Bandito anymore, do you?

ZAPPA: I have been of the opinion that the true intellectual community of the United States was populated mostly by Jewish-type people. I mean, it looked that way. Until suddenly I hear that the Anti-Defamation League is offended by a song about a Jewish Princess. Now, intelligent people are supposed to be logical. To me, it doesn't seem logical that

somebody who's Jewish should dislike the song. For instance, if Philip Roth or whatever his name was – the guy who wrote Portnoy's Complaint – writes a book that indicates to the average person who is not Jewish who reads this book that Jewish guys beat their meat and have all these weird fantasies, does the ADL go after Roth? No, because Roth is Jewish! Now, my offer to them is, would they like the song better if I converted to Judaism?

MUSICIAN: A lot of the recent reviews about you have stated that Cruising With Ruben & The Jets was your satire on the 50s, We're Only In It For The Money was your view of the 60s, and now Sheik Yerbouti is your answer to the 70s. Is that how you conceived that album when you put it together?

ZAPPA: No. Do you believe what you read in the papers?

MUSICIAN: Was there a particular concept in mind when you were doing Sheik Yerbouti?

ZAPPA: There's always a concept in mind when I do an album, but this one just happened to have a bunch of things in it that were more popular and more accessible than some of the other things that have come out. Obviously, there are some texts in there that are ideas people agree with. Because you don't really go around changing people's minds; you only say things, and if they already agree with you then they agree and like it, and if they don't agree with you then they say what you do is shit. Apparently I said some things that a lot of people agreed with.

MUSICIAN: Do you consider yourself a musical satirist?

ZAPPA: No, because the way I look at it is, that music's a direct extension of my personality. And I can't help it if I have a sense of humor. You know, I don't go to work and say, "I will now make a satire of this." I start writing and that's what comes out. I'm not specifically a satire person. I'm a composer with a sense of humor.

MUSICIAN: But when Peter Frampton has a hit song called "I'm In You," and then you come out with "I Have Been In You," isn't that a take-off on Frampton?

ZAPPA: Well, it's conceptual. If I was doing a satire, in the traditional sense, I would probably have to stick a little bit closer to the format of his original song, and take it apart piece by piece. If there is satire involved in "I Have Been In You," it's on a little bit different level.

MUSICIAN: Was Cruising With Ruben & The Jets a parody of the 50s then, or was that a serious attempt to play in that style?

ZAPPA: I'll tell you, there's a very scientific reason for the existence of Ruben & The Jets. The closest relationship between that album as an artistic event and another event from a different field that you can compare it to would be the point in Stravinsky's career in which he decided he was going to write neo-classical music. He started doing stuff like Pulcinella – writing music in his day and age, but using forms that were thoroughly out of style and frowned upon by the academic establishment. You have to remember that the American people don't have much going for them in the way of taste. I mean, taste is something that's inflicted on the American public by other outside forces. So if somebody tells you that something is cool, well, you'll think it's cool and you'll go out and buy it. To make an album like Cruising With Ruben & The Jets at that time in history, in '68, was very unfashionable. And everybody went, "Oh, I can't own that; it's not cool. It's not acid rock,

it's not fuzztone, it's not psychedelic. Who needs this?" I didn't do it just to be arbitrary – I like that kind of music, and I wanted to have some examples of that style in my total catalog output.

MUSICIAN: Is it difficult to find musicians who can play in that style convincingly?

ZAPPA: Yes, it's very difficult to find vocalists who understand that technique anymore. The sort of stuff Roy and Ray [Estrada and Collins] were doing – that's a lost art. That kind of falsetto stuff – there may be a few people left in the world who know how to do that. None of the younger singers know how to do that.

MUSICIAN: You sang the bass parts, right? That's a bit of a lost art in itself.

ZAPPA: Yeah, you have to understand what it means to make those sounds come out of your throat. They're not just low notes.

MUSICIAN: Did you play in bands a la Ruben & The Jets when you were in high school?

ZAPPA: Yeah, the first band I was in, I was a drummer in a band called the Ramblers, in San Diego. When I moved to Lancaster I put my own band together, called the Blackouts, and I was still playing drums. The biggest gig we ever had was at the Shrine Exposition Hall for an NAACP benefit; we were the warm-up act to Earl Bostic. The people weren't dancing to Earl Bostic for some reason, so he hung it up, and we went back out there and played. Everybody was jumping all over the place.

MUSICIAN: How were you viewed by your fellow students in high school?

ZAPPA: They probably thought I was pretty weird.

MUSICIAN: For what reason?

ZAPPA: Oh, I would refuse to sing the school song; I would refuse to salute the flag; I would wear weird things to school; I would get in trouble all the time, and get thrown out of school. I did a few things that were pretty notorious. I don't know whether I should stick them in the interview [laughs]

MUSICIAN: When you weren't getting into trouble, were you a good student?

ZAPPA: I did pretty good. I got thrown out of school so many times I lost a lot of units, and when it came time to graduate I was 20 or so units out of the picture. They figured that rather than keep me around for another year, they'd better get rid of me [laughs]. I mean, high school didn't represent much of an intellectual challenge.

MUSICIAN: Did you already feel like music was the most important thing?

ZAPPA: Yeah, pretty much. I used to be in the marching band in high school; I played snare drum. They threw me out because they caught me smoking under the bleachers with my maroon uniform on.

MUSICIAN: Were you brought up in a very ethnic environment?

ZAPPA: I'm a Mediterranean mongrel. I'm Italian, Greek, Arab, and French. When I was a kid, my parents used to talk Italian to each other, but I never learned it. When I was a little kid that was the 40s, and Italians weren't popular. Italians weren't cute, they weren't funny, there weren't fashionable, they weren't modern. They were fuckin' dogshits, especially on the East Coast. I mean, if there was an Italian – "Hey, let's go get the Italian!" A few years before that it was "Let's go get the Irish," then the Irish started chasing the Italians, then the Italians started chasing the Pollocks. You know, it's the evolutionary chain working its way down the sewer. I was in there right at the tail end of Italian abuse, so it wasn't too cool to be an Italian. No, it wasn't a real ethnic household.

MUSICIAN: Why did you switch from drums to guitar at age 18?

ZAPPA: The only part I used to really enjoy off the blues records was the guitar solos, because in those days the main instrument was the saxophone. Every time you turned around there was some schmuck blowing a saxophone. And in order to have the correct approach to the saxophone, you were limited to a very few notes in a pretty common style, and that got old real fast. But guitar solos were another story. To me, it seems incomprehensible that a person could listen to "Three Hours Past Midnight" by Johnny Guitar Watson and not be moved to get violent. I mean, that's really saying something. Same with the guitar solo on "Story Of My Life" by Guitar Slim. I mean, that stuff used to make me violent. I'd just want to get an icepick and go out and work over the neighborhood! I loved that. To me, that was the real world.

MUSICIAN: You've always been a huge fan of blues and R&B, but I don't find a whole lot of evidence of that type of music in your own music.

ZAPPA: Well, if you like something that doesn't mean you have to imitate it.

MUSICIAN: But it sounds as though you were really absorbed by it.

ZAPPA: Yeah, I understand it; I know how it works. But that's like people in the 50s who liked Chuck Berry and devoted their lives to learning how to play Chuck Berry's guitar solos. I couldn't play any of Guitar Slim's guitar solos or Johnny Guitar Watson's guitar solos or Clarence Gatemouth Brown's – but I liked them all. And I think I was influenced by them because of comprehending their melodic approach to what to do with those notes in that situation.

MUSICIAN: Ever hear "Okie Dokie Stomp" by Clarence Gatemouth Brown?

ZAPPA: Sure. As a matter of fact, where I went to school in San Diego, there were a lot of bands during the 50s, and true status was knowing how to play "Okie Dokie Stomp." In fact, the record didn't exist; the record was an oldie but goodie then, and it was very obscure. Not very many people had ever heard the original "Okie Dokie Stomp," but the guitar solo from that record was passed in the oral tradition from guy to guy. I can play the first part of it.

MUSICIAN: There are certain guitar solos – like "Hideaway" by Freddie King, or Billy Butler's solo on "Honky Tonk" – that are always played note for note.

ZAPPA: That's right. It's like you have respect for that thing as a musical event, the same way you wouldn't want to mess around with a well-tempered clavichord.

MUSICIAN: Do you appreciate bands that play old R&B tunes just like on the records, preserving the original version as if it were a museum piece?

ZAPPA: Yeah. The same way I can appreciate a recorder consort trying to recreate the music of the Middle Ages, or dance music of the Renaissance. It's something that should be done. If you like the music as an artistic statement, keep it alive. I saw a group in Ann Arbor, Michigan – I can't remember their name. They were dedicated to recreating the sound of the olden days. It was an upright bass, a drum set, a guitar, and a harmonica. They were playing all songs that nobody in the club had ever heard of, and I had all the records. I was going crazy! The drums were so shitty – I mean, real shitty old drums.

MUSICIAN: In the essay you wrote for Guitar Player Magazine, you said that even though Elmore James always played the same famous lick, you got the feeling that he meant it.

ZAPPA: Well, he did. Here's what that stuff is like: It transcends music and gets into realms of language. The English language has a few idiosyncrasies in the way catch phrases work. Like, "Well, excuuuuse me!" You know, Elmore James' lick could be his version of "Well, excuuuuse me!" then maybe a million guitar players want to go reedledeedeedelee-deedelee-deede/ee-deedee [laughs]. It transcends the music and gets into another realm – just the same way that "Well, excuuuuse me" doesn't mean excuse me, it means a whole other bunch of stuff that's not very specific but it's hovering in the atmosphere whenever you say it. See, there's a whole folklore gap for stuff that happened back then that's been corrupted by television and magazines and newspapers. The way they talk about the 50s, they tend to adhere to the white side, and capitalize on the sort of snide viewpoint of what they describe as inferior doo-wop music. And that's not what happened at all. I mean, I think that was probably the Renaissance of rhythm and blues back then. And whenever you hear about it, you're always hearing about it from extremely biased white people who are trying to keep their show or article commercial by laying very heavily on the Elvis Presley-type syndrome and all the most obvious large-selling hits of the time. But the best of that music still remains unknown. Boozoo Chavis! "Paper In My Shoe" by Boozoo Chavis. Have you heard that? That record is classic. It's got the world's most out of tune guitar on it! This guitar player is playing one chord: pedeetitee-pedeetitee-pedeetitee .... He's just out! And it's mixed right up front: pedeetitee-pedeetitee. You know that old-time, all-the-treble-taken-off-of-it kind of rhythm guitar sound? Oh, man, what a song. It's on one of those collected Rural Blues albums on Imperial.

MUSICIAN: On a lot of those records it's not even distracting or jarring if everything's out of tune.

ZAPPA: Ah, but if it's that out of tune, it transcends! The things that are really good in life are the things that transcend. It's not even a guitar anymore; it's a sound. You have to listen to it to go, "What the fuck is that?" And when you realize that it's a rhythm guitar player who's making that statement .... It goes beyond good taste and gets into realms of religion. See, that shows you the quarter-tone roots of that kind of music. Not only did John Lee Hooker invent sprechstimme, but Boozoo Chavis invented quarter-tone rock. Know what sprechstimme is? Schoenberg wrote this famous piece with a chamber ensemble and a female soprano singing settings of these famous abstract poems. But instead of singing them, she sings, and in some parts, speaks on pitch. And the German word for this is sprechstimme, and it was revolutionary. The notation for it shows the note head on the line, with the accidental, and on the stem there's an 'x', which means you half-speak, half-sing. This was the rage of the early 20th century, but, I mean, listen to a John Lee Hooker record. People aren't aware of the great strides made in the world of modern music by

these people of Negro persuasion in the early part of our century. That R&B was the best. All that white stuff is ... well, what can I say? Those white people, they mean well.

MUSICIAN: Did you see many live rock and roll shows when you were in high school in Southern California?

ZAPPA: I saw Big Jay McNeely, and I saw the Gaylarks. Remember them? "Tell Me Darling" on the Music City label. And I also saw Smokey Hogg, who had a hit single in San Diego called "Penitentiary Blues." There was just a vibe down there that was really conducive to rhythm and blues. There were a lot of Mexicans down there, and they always liked it. Man, they took it seriously in San Diego. There was some serious slow dancing – some serious Angora sweaters.

MUSICIAN: Was there a circle of people also into R&B whom you could hang around with in San Diego?

ZAPPA: Well, I didn't spend all of my school days in San Diego, but at the time I was down there, there was a real definite division between the people who liked rhythm and blues and the people who liked jazz. And anybody that liked Elvis Presley and that white person's music, well, you didn't even talk to them. You had the R&B guys, then you had the ones who went for Howard Rumsey's Lighthouse All Stars. The R&B guys used to find the ones who liked jazz and beat them up in the parking lot – I mean, it was that vivid a lifestyle difference between the jazz guys and the ones who liked the real music. The people who liked jazz would always go around putting you down – "Aw, you like 'Okie Dokie Stomp'? Why how dare you!"

MUSICIAN: So you sided with the R&B crowd?

ZAPPA: Yeah. Well, to me, there wasn't that much emotional depth in listening to something like "Martians Go Home" by Shorty Rogers – that kind of stuff. It was just bleak; it didn't have any balls to it! And, of course, it didn't have any words either.

MUSICIAN: Were you ever exposed to some of the jazz that preceded that, like bebop?

ZAPPA: I didn't hear any bebop until I moved away from San Diego, and moved to Lancaster, and I came across a Charlie Parker album. I didn't like it – because it sounded very tuneless, and it also didn't feel like it had any balls to it. But I did get an Oscar Pettiford album that I thought was good, and I had some Charlie Mingus albums that I really liked.

MUSICIAN: Mingus had balls.

ZAPPA: Definitely had balls. And the Oscar Pettiford record had some weird notes on it, you know, that sounded a little bit more avant-ey.

MUSICIAN: Uncle Meat was when a lot of critics decided to recognize you for your "jazz influenced rock." Did you see that album as a change in direction?

ZAPPA: There's no accounting for taste, you know. Like I said, do you believe what you read in the papers? Somebody told you that album was great? Big deal. That doesn't mean that it's great. If somebody told you it was shitty, it wouldn't mean that it was shitty. It is what it is, and the way in which people perceive it is generally a reflection of the

temperament of the times. I think Ruben & The Jets is a really good album, but at the time that it came out everybody thought, "You can't. It's corny."

MUSICIAN: Why do you think they had such a different opinion about Uncle Meat?

ZAPPA: Because maybe based on what was going on at that time, they thought that that was more acceptable – that was serious and Ruben & The Jets was shit. When, in fact, it's all serious, and it's all not serious.

MUSICIAN: Was Uncle Meat influenced by jazz at all?

ZAPPA: I don't think there are jazz influences in Uncle Meat. If there's any influence in Uncle Meat it's from Conlon Nancarrow. He's a composer who lives in Mexico, but was born in Kentucky. He writes music for player-piano that is humanly impossible to perform. He writes all these bizarre canons and weird structures – punches them out on player-piano rolls. The stuff is fantastic; there are a few albums of it. If you've never heard it, you've got to hear it – it'll kill you. Some of it sounds like ragtime that's totally bionic.

MUSICIAN: "America Drinks And Goes Home" [Absolutely Free] has a real jazz standard flavor. Did you write it to pay tribute to that style of music, or was it a parody of that genre?

ZAPPA: It's a very scientific parody of that genre. It's so subtle that you almost wouldn't see it as a parody. It's not a bad tune. The whole essence of that kind of music is that moron II-V-I syndrome, where everything modulates around the earth going II-V-I. It's an exercise in II-V-I stupidity.

MUSICIAN: You don't write many things in II-V-I.

ZAPPA: I've always been against dominant chords resolving to tonic chords. That, to me, is just the bottom line of white person music.

MUSICIAN: Isn't that ever present in black person's music?

ZAPPA: Mmm ... not always the same way – your old stock V-I. You get a lot of IV-Is in black music, and you get a lot of II-Vs, and other stuff. But that goddam V-I, and those goddamn jazz guys with II-V-I, and modulating the fucking thing around the Circle of Fifths. Why they have their nerve!

MUSICIAN: In your use of different chord structures, you come up with some really complex things. Is that a result of an overt attempt to do something more original, or is that just what you hear in your head?

ZAPPA: Since I don't like the sound of II-V-I, theoretically I must also like the sound of something else. And there are of course progressions that I like a lot, and I use them all the time. I go for what I like, rather than just a conscious attempt to wage a war against II-V-I. I just don't like II-V-I, unless you want to use it as a joke.

MUSICIAN: Did you ever go through any study of jazz?

ZAPPA: No.

MUSICIAN: Theory?

ZAPPA: I had some theory. When I was in high school, I was one of these incorrigible people, and to shut me up they figured, "Well, maybe he just likes music." So, since the high school I was going to didn't offer any theory classes, they would send me over to the junior college for an hour a day to take this theory class there. And it was taught by a jazz trumpeter named Mr. Russell, and we were working out of the Walter Piston harmony book. I did my little exercises in there for one semester, then I had maybe one semester at a junior college after that. But that's the extent of my formal training. The rest of it's all from the library.

MUSICIAN: A lot of people, when they get into theory, gravitate towards jazz because it's a music where they can see the theory in practice.

ZAPPA: Well, it depends on your approach to jazz. I mean, guys who go in there with a theoretical approach and say, "I will now apply these incredible extensions to II-V-I" – people who approach it that way – aren't the ones that you usually remember as being the great jazz musicians. I think the jazz that succeeds – and for my taste there's not much of it – is not based on the guy's erudition; it's based on balls. Balls operating in that kind of a format.

MUSICIAN: Is there any sort of submovement of jazz that you like more than others. Are you more into, say, Ornette Coleman than Duke Ellington?

ZAPPA: Well, I like Charlie Mingus, and I like Thelonius Monk, Eric Dolphy – I used to really like Harold Land, but I haven't heard anything from him in a long time. But that's about it.

MUSICIAN: Did you go to those sources when you started working with larger groups, voicing horn sections, etc.?

ZAPPA: No. My voicing of horn sections was a result of personal experimentation rather than following traditional formats.

MUSICIAN: Is that where you came up with different dissonances?

ZAPPA: Well, I've always been in favor of dissonance. I like food with a lot of cayenne pepper on it, and I like music with a lot of dissonance in it. And I can't stand that fucking V-I!! In fact, the stuff that I'm working with now is seven-part harmony – with no notes doubled. And most of the orchestra stuff is based on that. In other words, if you take any kind of a diatonic scale, it contains seven notes, and there are ways of spacing those seven notes so that at all times you're playing the entire scale. But you can make it sound like chords instead of blurs. Want to hear an example? I'll play you a beautiful seven-note chord [goes to the piano]. If you take a C major scale, it sounds like this. You have a certain number of mathematical possibilities of how you space those things out to get a chord. This chord is made up of all the notes in that scale: [plays chord]. That's spread out over an octave and a fifth. See, it's spelled E-F-A-C-D-G-B.

MUSICIAN: That doesn't sound that 'off' to me.

ZAPPA: That's the trick. It's how you take a whole scale and play it and make it sound like something you want to hear. Anybody can go: [smashes dissonant chords randomly up and down the keyboard]. The other thing I worked out is chords built in fifths. You build

chords in fifths plus one third, and that will also give you seven notes. Here's an example of that [plays scale]. That's C-E-B-F#-G-D-A. That's a third on the bottom, and all the other intervals are fifths except one half-step. It's a third, then a triad in fifths, then another triad in fifths up a half-step.

MUSICIAN: Do you have many modern classical influences?

ZAPPA: The main ones would be Varèse, Stravinsky, and Webern – probably in that order.

MUSICIAN: Some of your recorded work sounds like it would be impossible to reproduce live, but you manage to all the time. How much does the band rehearse?

ZAPPA: Well, the rehearsal schedule usually runs the summer months, for roughly two months, six days a week, six to ten hours a day. Then you do a tour. Then you get a few weeks off, and you get, like, a brush-up rehearsal for another month – six days a week, ten hours a day – then you go out and do a European tour. So that's a lot of rehearsing, and that rehearsing will represent not only the time and sweat, but it'll represent a lot of money. Because we rehearse with all of our equipment and full crew, and we have to rent a motion picture sound stage in order to set it up. The dollars involved in preparing a band to play that stuff and go out on the road are incredible. I have a huge cash commitment just to pay salaries and rentals on the hall and stuff like that before we can go out.

MUSICIAN: Do you always carry your own sound system on the road?

ZAPPA: Right, because I've never seen a promoter yet who would take as much care about providing sound and lights for a group as I would.

MUSICIAN: Do you think about music in terms of its social purpose?

ZAPPA: I think about the way in which other people use it. I think it's reprehensible to take your music and put it in the service of a political party or some sort of cause. Because ultimately, music is worth more than any cause or any party. You know, to me, music is the ultimate suave-ness. Music is the best; it's just the best. It's where the action is.

MUSICIAN: But don't you think there's an inherent social function surrounding, say, blues that's vastly different from the social function surrounding –

ZAPPA: I don't believe that a person like Elmore James picks up his bottleneck and goes reedledee-deedelee-deedelee-deedelee-deedee in order to stimulate somebody's capacity to promote social change. I don't think that's the motivation. And I think the idea that blues is this music of struggle and all that stuff is pure shit that white people figured out in order to make it okay to listen to it. Because if there's one thing that all these white academic nerds have in common it's that they just can't appreciate balls, you know! I think that a lot of that stuff is just that the guy just wants to play that and wants to make that noise. That's his message; he's condensed his whole aesthetic into reedledee-deedelee-deedee. That's where he's at, and he's not too concerned about whether or not somebody in a college someplace is going to perceive it as being a viable force for social change.

MUSICIAN: But wouldn't you say that there's a very different social function in what Elmore James is doing intuitively – as unconscious as it may be – and the very self-conscious function that avant-garde players in lofts in New York apply to their music?

ZAPPA: Well, first of all, whenever you play ugly music, it always helps to have an elaborate philosophical system surrounding it to rationalize its ugliness. This has been my experience with much of the avant-garde. I mean, let's face it, a lot of it sounds like shit. But, if you've got this elaborate philosophical system to go along with it to rationalize it and explain it, then it can still sound like shit but it means something else. You know what I mean [laughs]? These white people, they have a way with this stuff.

MUSICIAN: But 90% of the players of the avant-garde scene are black and their audience is 90% white.

ZAPPA: You have to understand something: White people are not denoted by the color of their skin. See, I'm not talking about pigmentation; I'm talking about the white person attitude. There's a lot of people with black skin that have got this white person attitude, and I'm tellin' ya, that's one of the reasons why there's no good rhythm and blues anymore! They've got this white person thing going for them; it's terrible. Don't they know how to have a good time?

MUSICIAN: Would you say that a fair amount of what's called avant-garde is pure shit?

ZAPPA: But see, that's the idea – it's pure shit [laughs].

MUSICIAN: But there's other stuff that's been called shit – because people didn't understand it – and later when people understood it, the guys were called geniuses. Frank Zappa is a good example.

ZAPPA: Look, the thing about people saying whether something is shit or it's wonderful is irrelevant to the thing being discussed. Because whatever you think is wonderful I may think is shit, and vice versa. And neither one of our opinions matters, because of the thing that's being discussed – it exists because of whatever it is, you know. We are not really called upon to make these pronouncements on its value.

MUSICIAN: But wouldn't you say that there's got to be some music –

ZAPPA: That's total shit? No! Absolutely not. Because there's always somebody that likes it even if it's just the guy himself who's playing it – and he's entitled to love it, and it's entitled to be as good as he thinks it is. And whatever we say about it doesn't make any difference, because we don't know what went into the manufacture of it. A garage band that plays a one-chord song, and plays the fuck out of it, because they're straining to fulfill 100% of their understanding of the E major chord on the guitar, has achieved something spectacular if the day before they couldn't even make an E major chord on the guitar. But today they're whanging it out, and it's really coming out good. You know, that is musical achievement. And you might say it's shit, but to them it's the greatest thing that ever happened, and they're entitled to have their opinion be correct. I think the opinion of the person who's making it is the one that should prevail – not the opinion of the listener. Because you might have had a bad day today; you might not be in the mood for the E major chord. You want to hear F today, or C7 to F?

MUSICIAN: Have you ever been to any of the New Wave clubs, like CBGB's in New York?

ZAPPA: Yeah, I think it's a nice scene – in New York it's a nice scene, because it fits there; it's part of that city grit. But when they bring the stuff to California, you know what it is? It's

a guy who wants to look punk, waiting for the record contract. You know, let's go punk – let's get a contract. They're all auditioning for certification as the punkest new thing. But I saw groups in New York that couldn't get a record contract in a million fuckin' years, and they looked like they didn't even care. You talk about nihilism! I mean, I saw some mongoloid behaviour there. It was great! You know, just "Let's get up there and be mongoloids." What the fuck?

MUSICIAN: What's your method for composing?

ZAPPA: It depends on what I'm composing. I carry music paper in my briefcase, and when I'm on the road I write sketches-boxes of them. Then I come back, play them, tweeze them, correct them, chop them up, reassemble them, and scribble it all out with a ballpoint pen. Then I give it to a copyist, and it comes back beautiful and neat.

MUSICIAN: Do you ever write sketches that are purely experimental?

ZAPPA: Yeah. Suppose you get a theory, and you want to build a section in a composition that has a certain number of mathematical fixed points – it's not mathematical; it's just formulaic, right? It's serial. But not 12-tone. For instance, you say, "This section will contain all chords that are made of five notes; each chord must contain these intervals – a third, half-step, and a fourth, and a major seventh." Then you set about randomly constructing – first you write a line, then you harmonize the line with five-note chords that adhere to that formula. Then you work it out with voice leading. It's just like a cross-word puzzle – it occupies your time in an airport. You get done doing that, you come back to the piano, and you start playing the chords, and you modify it to suit your ear.

MUSICIAN: When does the rhythm and time signature come in?

ZAPPA: That could come into it at any time. It could be just a series of notes, like a row, or it could be a rhythmic pattern that you like and eventually you want to attach pitches to the rhythm pattern. That was the process for "The Black Page #1" [Zappa In New York]; it started off with a drum solo, and then I wrote a melody line. It can go any number of ways.

MUSICIAN: Are you very disciplined when it comes to writing music?

ZAPPA: What's your idea of a disciplined music writer?

MUSICIAN: When you have a project to work on, do you get up and actually spend a number of hours uninterrupted and turn something out?

ZAPPA: Absolutely. If I'm left to my own devices and I'm only writing music, I'll go 12 and 14 hours a day, sitting in a chair, and the only thing I get up for is to go to the toilet or get a cup of coffee. I love that – but I never get a chance to do it. First of all, if you spend your life doing that, what are you going to do for a living? If you're a composer in America, everything is stacked against you. There's no outlet for that kind of work. If you want to write enormous orchestra pieces, who's going to pay for it? Who's paying for the musicians? Who pays the copyists? I mean, so far on this project, [a planned Vienna Symphony concert which has since been cancelled] I have spent $44,000 on copying. That's what I've spent – just to get this far with the project, so I had scores in my hand to show those people in Vienna. Now I have more copying bills to get the parts for the orchestra. The copying has been going on for over two years.

MUSICIAN: With all the costs you've mentioned, it's amazing that you're even breaking even, but you seem to be in a pretty secure position.

ZAPPA: It depends on what kind of style you want to live in. As you can see, I don't live in a mansion; I live in a house that's made out of stucco, and it's a total fucking mess. And I'm not interested in flash. We have enough money to get tons of coffee every week, all the cigarettes we want, we can buy tacos, and – hey, we're doing okay [laughs]. It's not Tobacco Road over here, but the net from the work that I do doesn't go into anything but music. Most of the money that comes back from the tours is either reinvested in equipment or it's reinvested in the salaries of the people who are providing services to make the project happen, or it's reinvested in services of people who are needed to make the project continue – all your office expenses are amortized out of that. And the musicians are on a yearly salary, whether they're working or not.

MUSICIAN: Do you see the guitar as just a vehicle for composition?

ZAPPA: The guitar is a perfect vehicle for composition, as long as the accompaniment doesn't get in the way. I'm not interested in being the fastest guitar player in the world, or the cutest or the best dancer – or even the most sincere.

MUSICIAN: What about establishing a distinctive guitar style?

ZAPPA: I'm not concerned with that. I'm concerned with playing melodies as they come into my head – versus the harmonic climate, versus the rhythm section. It's an act of composition, not an act of guitar showmanship. It's just like writing, except that there's no copyist, there's no orchestra – you just make it up and you go.

MUSICIAN: When you came out with Freak Out, the thing that seemed to jar everybody was that it had a sense of humor.

ZAPPA: Well, you'll find that the reason that that's always going to stick out is because there's a lack of humor everyplace else. Look, I'm an honest person, and I try to keep a certain type of integrity in the work that I do. I try to make my work consistent with who and what I am, okay? And if I have a sense of humor, I'm not going to subdue it in order to make myself more acceptable to the mainstream that wants to take life seriously. To me, that would be like putting myself in prison or something. I write it and that's the way it comes out.

MUSICIAN: But does the oddball sense of humor sometimes overshadow the musicality itself?

ZAPPA: Only to people who are just staggered by senses of humor. But, look ... it doesn't matter. I do it and it's done. Whether somebody laughs at it, or whether they listen to it, it doesn't matter.

MUSICIAN: Did you ever reach a point where you wanted to consciously tone down the humor and craziness in order to be more accepted as a legitimate composer?

ZAPPA: First of all, there's nothing illegitimate about having a sense of humor. See, you got that fucking attitude hanging over your head – that things that are funny aren't real and aren't good, and things that are totally serious are wonderful. This is what I hate.

MUSICIAN: Do you think about factors such as markets and audiences when you put records out?

ZAPPA: Well, I have a mental picture of what kind of person listens to my records. And when I'm working on something, I say, "This'll crack 'em up." You have to have some kind of image before you for a target.

MUSICIAN: How would you describe your type of fan?

ZAPPA: Well, it's hard to verbalize it, but the stuff that I do is originally written to amuse me. And, like I said before, if somebody already agrees with you, then they'll agree with you. So I presume that the person that really gets off on that stuff has similar tastes to me.

MUSICIAN: Do you think you have a nucleus of an audience that has followed you around since Freak Out?

ZAPPA: No. See, that's a popular presumption. They figure that once you start in the music business whoever likes you at the beginning is going to be your love slave for the rest of your career. And it don't work that way. I mean, I've been doing this for about 15 years, and most of the people who were the original consumers for the Freak Out album don't even go out to concerts anymore. They're all working their day jobs and worrying about the important things of life, you know. And our audience seems to get younger every year – we pick up more and more young people.

MUSICIAN: Do you think the image that the media has of you is very accurate?

ZAPPA: No, but it's irrelevant.

MUSICIAN: But there is an image.

ZAPPA: Oh yeah, there's definitely an image. It's very confused and contradictory, because of the stuff that's been written about me in the papers. But I think that if anybody was ever to manifest an exact replica of the kind of person I really am and stick it in the newspapers, I don't think people would bother with it. Because what's exciting about a guy who gets up in the morning and sits at the piano and writes little ballpoint pen notes on a piece of paper, and then goes to bed? You know what I do when you leave here? I go back to the piano until it's time to go to bed. There's nothing exciting about that. It's better to have people thinking that I'm out being totally crazy – because that's exciting.

MUSICIAN: I'd have to say that you seem a lot more normal than most musicians, but then again what type of normal person names his children Moon Unit, Dweezil, and Ahmet Emuukha Rodan?

ZAPPA: If that were the only criterion by which to judge a person weird, then I am qualified. But, in the rest of the context of contemporary America, a person who gets up in the morning and spends his day sitting at the piano writing ballpoint pen notes on little pieces of paper is weird. He may be boring – but it's weird, you know. It's that kind of weird. A lot people in the United States think that somebody who wears mascara and plays with a boa constrictor is weird. And I don't think that's weird; I think that's right up Warner Bros.'s alley. It just depends on what your idea of weird is. You know what I think is weird? People who will really buy cases of Perrier water and really run around in a blue sweat suit. That's weird!

MUSICIAN: Speaking of weird, one of the great rock and roll myths of all-time involves a gross-out contest which allegedly took place onstage between you and Captain Beefheart. Could you please clarify that once and for all?

ZAPPA: Yeah, I've heard that myth in many different guises. It's supposed to be me versus the Fugs, me versus somebody in the audience – but always I end up eating shit on the stage. You know, the first time I heard this rumor, I was in a club in England called the Speakeasy, which used to be a music business hangout in the 60s. I'm sitting there and this guy from the Flock – remember the Flock? – comes over to me and goes, "Hey, Frank. Man, it's really great to meet ya. Hey, I heard about the gross-out contest and that's really fantastic the way you ate that shit!" I said, "Man, I never ate any shit onstage!!" And he goes, "You didn't? Aww." And then he walked away – fuckin' broken-hearted, you know. I mean, people want to believe this. I'll tell you, the closest I ever came to eating shit was at a Holiday Inn buffet in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

Frank Zappa on Edgar Varèse

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By John Diliberto and Kimberly Haas

If any composer has come to epitomize the neglected genius, it is Edgar Varèse. Born in France in 1883, Varèse was a student protege and friend of 20th century masters such as Debussy, Busoni, Richard Strauss, Ravel, Picasso, and Rodin. His quest for artistic freedom and a release from the traditions and dogmatism of the classical music hierarchy placed him on a search for the "liberation of sound" that culminated in his moving to America. This search led him to the use of new and found instruments in the from of sirens, Chinese blocks and countless other percussives, a break from traditional tonalities and structures, and eventually to the use of magnetic tape constructions -- "musique concrete" -- in composition and performance.

Until the last decade of his life (he died in 1965), Varèse created in relative obscurity. His works were performed only as controversial premieres by the likes of Leopold Stokowski, and they never entered into the standard classical repertoire. In spite of a lack of recognition in his lifetime, Varèse's influence was widely felt by those who subsequently questioned the creativity and meaning of music. Composers such as John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and George Crumb have all sought answers based at least partially on Varèse's work. Charlie Parker begged to be taken on as a pupil of Varèse, and in recent years his shadow has hung over Joe Zawinul, whose dynamic percussion figures in "Unknown Soldier" are derived from Varèse's "Ionisation". Many artists from the AACM, such as the Art Ensemble Of Chicago and Anthony Braxton, have Varèse as a precursor in the use of "little instruments" and atonal structures. In rock, Pink Floyd's earlier works, such as "Atom Heart Mother" and the studio album of "Ummagumma", employ the use of tape constructions interpolated with real time playing a la Varèse's "Deserts".

But for many people the first knowledge of Varèse's name came from a 1966 LP entitled "Freak Out!" by the Mothers Of Invention, in the form of a quote attributed to Varèse: "The present day composer refuses to die" (He actually said "The present day composer in America..."). Though he has been one of Varèse's most ardent public supporters, the Varèse influence is not always evident in Frank Zappa's rock songs. It turns up in his more serious music, tape constructions, and arrangements, especially on "Lumpy Gravy" and the "200 Motels" soundtrack. It is more Varèse's spirit of breaking from conventions and finding your own voice that one finds in Zappa's work.

This past spring, Zappa served as master-of-ceremonies at a Varèse retrospective conducted by Joel Thome with the Orchestra Of Our Time, playing to an audience for whom Zappa was the principle draw at New York City's Palladium Theatre. Zappa's obvious regard for Varèse's music served him well in a role reduced to keeping the audience quiet during the performances. The day before the concert, Kimberly Haas and John Diliberto interviewed Zappa, during which he elucidated a contemporary perspective on Varèse and his music.

John Diliberto: How did you first find out about Edgar Varèse?

Frank Zappa: That's a very simple story. I read an article in Look magazine in the early '50s which was a feature saying what a great guy Sam Goody was because he was such an exciting merchandiser and he could sell anything, he could sell any kind of record. And to give an example of what a great merchandiser he was, it said that he was even able to sell an album called "Ionisation" which had a bunch of drums banging, and it described the album in very negative terms. When I read that, I thought it sounded exactly like the kind of album that I wanted to hear because I had been playing drums since I was 12. So I went looking for the album and I finally found it after a couple of months' search, and I took it home, put it on, and I loved it as soon as I heard it.

JD: What year was that?

FZ: '53

JD: So Edgar Varèse was still really active at that time?

FZ: Well, as a matter of fact he was just becoming active again. He stopped composing pretty much around 1940 because nobody would play his music, and he couldn't earn a living. So he was messing with various other odd jobs trying to keep himself afloat, and he just stopped writing. When I called him up in 1955, he had either just finished or was in the process of working on "Deserts", which according to his wife Louise (I talked to her last night) he just sort of did bits and pieces on for 15 years. That was the one he started around the '40s and just didn't have any urge to complete because he knew nobody was going to play it.

JD: Do you think the fact that Varèse was alive and relatively active during the time when you were getting into his music affected you differently than if he was an older composer?

FZ: He was already quite old at that time, and I just liked it because of the way it sounded. It didn't have anything to do with the splendor and charm of all the folklore that goes with being a composer. I was dealing with it just as something that I heard that provided enjoyment for me.

JD: Do you think that your response would be different if you were hearing it for the first time now, with the background that you have?

FZ: No, the only difference would be that the background I have now is probably stronger in the technical field, and I'd be able to listen to a recording, say, and make judgments about the quality of production, the quality of the pressing, the quality of the engineering, and the quality of the performance. Whereas at that time I didn't know any of those kinds of things, and I just accepted it and liked it. Today I would make more critical distinctions between one performance and another; I have just about every record of any of his pieces that's available, and I do have my favorites among those.

JD: Do you think that people in general would have a different reaction if Varèse's music was happening now as opposed to 70, 60 years ago?

FZ: People would have a different reaction to it today depending on the packaging in which it was presented. For instance, if he suddenly jumped on the scene with his fingernails painted black, shocking orange hair, some funny-looking sunglasses, maybe a skinny tie and pants that were too short, pointed shoes, and he bopped around a little bit while the thing was being performed, it would probably register as very exciting and new. But if a

man who looked like Varèse actually walked out and presented this to today's world, I don't think that people would be too stimulated by it.

JD: What aspects of his music do you think have been absorbed into contemporary music now? On one level, say, the contemporary pop level or the rock level and on another level the contemporary classical music level?

FZ: Anytime you watch a show on television and there's a scary scene and there's one sustained chord and one or two tiny little percussion bips in the background, you'll know the guy who wrote that movie score, that TV score, never would have thought of it unless Varèse had done it first, because percussion just wasn't used that way, and he proved that one little knock on the claves or one little boop on the temple block against a tense chord told so much about a certain topic; nobody had done anything like that before. He just said hey, this will work, and he did it and a lot of people when they hear that scary music don't know where a lot of the mechanisms of scary music came from. But he didn't write the things to be scary, I don't think, he just wrote them because he was dealing with the musical raw materials in a very individualistic way.

JD: I think Varèse often said he wanted to liberate sound from the limitations of the keyboard. Do you think that he succeeded in doing that in his music?

FZ: I don't know.

JD: Do you think he would have succeeded more so had he had access to a current synthesizer?

FZ: No, not necessarily, I mean he would have written a different kind of music. But the thing that is fantastic about what he wrote for normal instruments is that he got sounds out of them that nobody had dreamed of before. For instance, "Deserts", which is probably the starkest of the pieces in terms of the way they deal with the raw material, there're special overblown chords that produce difference tones, which you wouldn't be able to get any other way -- you know what I'm talking about? If you take two intervals and play them very loudly on a woodwind instrument -- for instance, this one spot where two piccolos are playing either a Major second or minor second apart, very high octave -- when you blow it real hard you hear a third note that's not there. To know in advance what's going to come out and to plan your composition to achieve effects like that was something that people just hadn't thought of doing before.

JD: Do you think that Varèse's work with electronics was very influential on the academic level and on the pop level?

FZ: No, because the things that he was doing with electronics were probably related more to sculpture than they were to electronics. The tapes that he did were collages of sound sources and not necessarily electronic music as people think of it today.

JD: It was musique concrete.

FZ: Yeah, it was musique concrete.

JD: But he was still breaking into new territory at the time with "Poeme Electronique" and "Deserts".

FZ: Well, I don't know historically who came first -- the chicken or the egg -- in that realm. I know there were some other composers working in that medium at that time -- I don't know who fired the first shot, so to speak -- but he didn't really have good equipment to do it on. I mean some of the tapes were distorted, and I don't think that he wanted to hear that rough kind of sound. I think that some of the effects are gotten just by over-modulating input and saturating the tape. To me it's like a guy who didn't really know how a tape recorder worked and wanted this part to be really loud, he didn't know that if you just cranked it up it wouldn't get really loud, it would just get really shitty. I mean that's what it sounds like to me, he might have had something else in mind, but the equipment that he had access to was not very elaborate -- things were pretty crude back then.

JD: In Varèse's biography there are times where Louise seems to indicate where Edgar, like Stravinsky, didn't like emotion in his music.

FZ: Well, it depends on how you're going to use the word "emotion". I think that from a scientific standpoint the way that materials are put together you wouldn't think of as an emotional procedure, but the materials have a very emotional impact when you hear them put together. And there are certain indications in the score that aren't just "play this loud, play this soft." There's one part in "Hyperprism" where the trombone player is instructed to say "ho ho ho" through his horn. That's not much of an emotion, but it's not exactly scientific either. And in either "Ameriques" or "Arcana" it has that little piccolo melody that's doubled with bells dancing along up on the top, and when he wrote that she told me that he would demonstrate it and whistle it and kind of dance around the room a little bit, and it was a cheerful thing -- not all deadly serious in the sense that these are measured qualities being played against each other in order to yield this scientific result at the end of the piece. I mean, it's human music, and that's one of the reasons why I get such a good feeling from it -- because it's not based on a mathematical formula. It's not like that other sterile kind of music that's really pretty hard to take. He's dealing with SOUND; he writes that stuff because it SOUNDS good.

JD: That's one aspect that I wanted to get into, Varèse's breaking away from common melodies, common rhythms, and the way he was dealing with SOUNDS. Could you talk about that a little bit?

FZ: Well, a lot depends on how much you understand about ordinary music, you know, music of the so called "real world" and what people normally think of as being "acceptable" classical music and what they think of as being "quality" classical music -- the good stuff that had gone before. My theory about all that runs something like this: as soon as it was discovered that a man or anybody, even a dog, could write something down with symbols that could be decoded by another person, or dog, later to produce music, it was discovered right about that same time that you couldn't earn a living from doing this. And it was also discovered that if you wanted to do this and hear music, you had to be patronized -- somebody had to pay the freight -- this was either the church or a king. If the church didn't like what you wrote, they got out the red-hot tweezers and pulled out your toenails; if the king didn't like what you wrote he'd chop your head off. The kings all had syphilis and were crazy, and the church was, you know, the church. So, just because somebody is paying to have a composition done or is paying to support a composer doesn't necessarily mean that the music that is written to assuage the taste of the paying entity is good, but all the music that survives that we call classical music is based on the taste of either a clerical person or some crazy rich person with a crown on his head. Those norms are perpetuated by music critics who now stand in the shoes of the disgusting clerics and the crazy kings, and they keep judging the music based on these norms which

shouldn't be applied, and it's unfortunate that the norms came into existence in the first place.

JD: So how did Varèse move away from these norms?

FZ: He just said that this is wrong. I never spoke with him about it, but I would imagine from listening to the music that he just chucked the whole thing out the window, and said "I'm going to do it my way." It sounds like that because it doesn't depend on any of those mechanisms; it has a whole different set of mechanisms that makes it work, and it's very ingenious the way it's put together, and it's a very brave step to take.

JD: The one thing I notice about Varèse's music is that you have to approach it with different ears so you can feel what's going on.

FZ: Right! I'll give you another quote that I got from talking to Louise yesterday. She told me, "I'm not a musician, I don't have any technical skill and I like his music," and she said that she asked Varèse to teach her some music, and he said it's not necessary--"just be like a blotter and absorb it."

Kimberly Haas: In retrospect, I've seen musical historians call Varèse the most influential or the most innovative composer of the 20th century. Do you think that is true?

FZ: Well, I would say that he's not the most influential. He was probably the most innovative in terms of one guy against the world setting out on his own and doing individualistic-type things. Probably the most influential composer in terms of how many people imitated his style, in recent years, that award would go to Webern first, for being the founder of the "boop-beep" school and also to Penderecki because of the "texture" music that a lot of people imitate. But I think that even his music grows out of some of the textural experiments that Varèse did.

KH: What about Aaron Copland?

FZ: I think Aaron Copland probably did more to foster the stereotype of American music as being any symphonic event that has a xylophone doubling the violin section. There is so much American music that has been written by the American academic branch of composition and you're going: "Hey it's an American symphony they're playing -- it's a hoedown tune and there's a xylophone doubling the melody on top." I mean there're certain things that Copland has written that I really enjoy, like the "Fanfare For The Common Man" is one of the really hot tunes of the century I think, but there's something too easy about it.

KH: It seems like he's the mentor of many, many composer today.

FZ: Well, if you want to be immediately accepted all you have to do is write those American kind of tunes, put them in an orchestral setting, and then everybody will say that you are really great. Or you write fugues -- well who gives a shit about that? That's not the problem anymore. I mean if you want to write a fugue, fine, but to use all of those norms to judge the quality of what's being done.... that's a bad thing because there're people working in other fields of music looking to do other things, and as long as the music critics judge their work by those other standards, they're always going to come up losers. And with the public only being told negative things about new music, this image being perpetuated of this music being something for the few, is bad; it keeps you dumb; it keeps

you mediocre. America should take pride in things that have been produced here that are exceptional, that are different, that are daring, not things that pretend to be artistic, things that pretend to be different, or things that pretend to be daring. America should opt for the real shit. But they don't because they never get exposed to it. The really dangerous stuff never gets on the radio, and you never hear about it. Because everything you hear about the so-called musical life in the United States is told to you in newspapers and magazines by people who are not qualified to speak of it, because they can't tell a good composition from a bad one, and they can't tell the difference between a great composition that has been badly performed or a mediocre composition that got the big MOLTO VIBRATO treatment by a major American orchestra. There's no taste involved there.

KH: I've never seen any of Varèse's music performed in concert. Is it captured well on record, compared to the performance?

FZ: It's two different experiences. In the performance you can see what the people have to go through in order to play it, and that's exciting; remember that when you go to a concert, easily 50 percent of what you experience is visual. But on record I would say that I've heard a couple of the pieces that I thought got real good performances. But not all of them have been performed greatly, yet. You know they're just sort of mediocre performances, because nobody spends the amount of time to perfect the recording. You hear of groups like Fleetwood Mac spending $1,300,000 over 13 months in the studio to record "Tusk", and they don't spend anywhere near that to get a good performance of orchestral music because the records don't sell, and the companies that put the records out don't want to invest a disproportionate amount of money on something that's not going to bring them a return.

KH: It was the last couple of years of his life, during the early '60s, when Varèse finally got some acclaim here. The way it's always described, it's like he got his first recognition from Columbia Records, and then all of a sudden everyone was applauding him.

FZ: I think that in order for him to make it, he had to get on Columbia Records so that the pieces could be heard, so that there could be some distribution of the pieces. I know that if Columbia hadn't recorded the music and done a certain amount of promotion for the release of those albums, then his royalties during the last years of his life wouldn't have been what they were. He actually managed to make $6,000.

KH: Do you think Varèse might have achieved his acclaim earlier, or that his career might have gone differently, if he had stayed in Europe?

FZ: If he had stayed in Germany, I don't know, it's hard for me to speculate about that because I'm not familiar with that part of his career. He did go to Europe for a while and achieved more success in France during the '30s than he had experienced in the United States. Even the critics that didn't like his music didn't dismiss him as a buffoon. You know, he was written about in the United States like he was some kind of quack who didn't know what he was doing, but even the people who didn't really care for the pieces in Paris still admitted the fact that he was a genius and he was definitely doing something that nobody had attempted to do before. Americans don't give you that break; everything in America is designed to be mediocre--everybody craves mediocrity here--and it's the wrong way to do it. Life is more fun with a few things that are excellent, that can be appreciated, you know. Life doesn't get better if everybody is that same; that's boring. You want that, move to Russia. Put on a grey suit and everybody do the same thing, work the same job. Being in a

land that is supposed to provide opportunities to do things that are personal and individual--they're punished here. That's the temper of the times. You do something that is really daring, and you take your life in you hands. Everybody goes for the mediocre stuff.

Absolutely Frank

First Steps in Odd Meters
From "Guitar Player" magazine, November 1982

Few Guitarists are unaware of Frank Zappa, who for the past 16 years has produced dozens of albums featuring sharp satire, full-scale orchestrations, and powerful guitar solos. Last profiled as the cover subject of the Jan. '77 issue of Guitar Player, Zappa has since released several albums, including the three-record Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar series for his Barking-Pumpkin label: Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar [BPR 1111], Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar Some More [BPR 1112], and Return Of The Son Of Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar [BPR 1113]. Although all of Frank's albums have a sizeable quantity of guitar work, this trio of LPs contains pieces that are specifically guitar- oriented.
This Month, we welcome Frank as a regular columnist, presenting the first installment of a series in which he addresses specific questions regarding his creation of the Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar series. In this and subsequent columns, he will also discuss his views on music and solo techniques beyond the range of these three LPs. Transcriptions of Zappa's pieces are provided by Steve Vai, who has been one of Frank's guitarists for the past few years.

Guitar Player Magazine: What made you decide to do the Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar series?
Frank Zappa: There were a lot of requests from a certain group of fans that we have for an album that just had a lot of guitar solos on it. I mean, it's not that they delivered a specific order as to how it was going to be put together, but there was a demand for albums with a lot of guitar playing. Although I play maybe anywhere from five to eight extended solos during a concert, the basic style of the show that we take on the road is not guitar-spectacular oriented. There is SOME guitar playing, and some people really like that stuff. And so to accommodate them, I put it together.
Guitar Player Magazine: Why did you choose material recorded over a four-year period, rather than taping new songs especially for this project?
Frank Zappa: Well, there's a good reason for that. First of all, I find it very difficult to play in the studio; I don't think that I've ever played a good solo of any description in the recording studio. I just don't have the feeling for it. And up until the time that I got my own studio, I was working in commercial ones where you have to pay anywhere from a hundred to two hundred dollars an hour for the time. There you don't have the luxury of sitting and perfecting what it is that you're going to play, whereas if you have a collection of tapes made over the period of a few years - which I do - you can go through that stuff and find musical examples that achieve some aesthetic goal that you're interested in achieving. Then you collect those together and make the best possible performance out of that.
Guitar Player Magazine: How did you determine which songs you wanted? Was there a scheme?
Frank Zappa: I tried to get different examples of different types of things that I play. I have one basic style, but inside of that style there are different things that I play. I wanted to have various examples of those things. And most of the selections were made on my own gut reaction to hearing the tapes and saying, "I like this solo" or "I don't like that one" - just trying to find things that would fit together.

Guitar Player Magazine: Your music prominently features unusual rhythms and syncopations. A good example is "Five Five Five" [Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar]. What kind of metric scheme was used?
Frank Zappa: It's in 5/8, 5/8, 5/4. You count it like this: One two one two three, one two one two three, one-and two-and three-and four-and five- and.
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Guitar Player Magazine: In a piece such as "Five Five Five", where you're in a meter that would generally be considered odd for mainstream rock or jazz, how would someone approach that without feeling as if they had two left feet?
Frank Zappa: It's a very guitar-oriented piece because of the way it uses the open string. So it's kind of an easy thing to pick up on the guitar, in spite of the odd rhythm. As long as the numbers involved tend to frighten you, though, then the odd rhythms are not your meat. Don't worry about the numbers - you just have to worry about what the FEEL is. When I wrote that particular song, I never even stopped to figure out what the time signature was. I don't worry about that if I'm playing it on the guitar. If I'm writing it for an orchestra, then I do. But I don't calculate how things that I make up on guitar are going to look on paper or how it's ultimately going to be. I just play it, and then figure out what it is later, after I've recorded it. In other words, my theory is that written music in no way assures the pedigree of the musical quality of what's being played. Just because it's on paper doesn't make it any better or any worse than any other kind of music. Music on paper is just a convenient way of showing musical ideas from one person to another without having to hum it to him. And when you get things that are complicated, it's really time- consuming to hum them.
Guitar Player Magazine: So you view writing as a shortcut.
Frank Zappa: It's a shortcut; it's a storage method. And in the case of the transcriptions that are coming from the guitar albums, they're no longer shortcuts because they don't need to shortcut it anymore - they're all done. [Ed. Note: Transcriptions from the Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar series are scheduled to be available in the next few months.] But it's the way to show people who are interested in that kind of rhythm what it looks like on paper and how it works. Also, in a couple of examples it gives you a kind of positive proof that ESP does exist: The guitar parts and the drum parts for some of the things are transcribed and notated together on two staves, and you can see that the drummer - in this case Vinnie Colaiuta - and myself were playing exactly the same thing in a number of places where it would have been impossible to guess what was going on. It's the frequent little turns that are exactly ON, and then coming out on the downbeat in the next bar, and over to the next bar after that.
Guitar Player Magazine: On the inner sleeve of your Shut Up albums is music from "The Black Page." There are figures such as a triplet with groupings of three, five, and seven contained within. How do you count such an intricate part?
Frank Zappa: Well, unless you're really skilled at sight-reading that type of material, you have to start by reading it slowly. So I think you're referring to bar 15 of "The Black Page". And that's a tricky bar to play. But it CAN be played and it has been played over and over again by a lot of different musicians in and out of the band. And it's a good place to start if you want to come into a direct confrontation with the type of rhythm that I use all the time. Any piece of time can be subdivided any old way you like. And that's what happens when people talk, people don't talk in 4/4 or 3/4 or 2/4- they talk *all over the place*. And if the rhythm that you play follows along with the natural scan of human speech, it's going to have a different feel to it. And in a way, it sounds weird; in another way, it sounds totally natural. It just depends on what you expect to hear from a piece of music. So, to count that particular bar, you divide the bar into a half note triplet. That's the big bracket. And inside each of the half-note triplet beats, there are further subdivisions. That's all.

GPM: For someone who has spent a great deal learning mostly from song with 4/4 rock beats by guitar heroes such as Van Halen, et al, what would be a good way to ease into more complex rhyhmic usage?
Frank Zappa: There's no reason why someone should break out of the Van Halen mode. If you keep playing that way, you're always going to be assured of work. I don't recommend that anybody copy what I do or follow in that musical path, because what it's going to lead to is being outside of the framework where you can earn a living at what you do. You know, the more you play in 4/4, the better off you're going to be. That's the bottom line! Most of the people who read *Guitar Player*, I think, are interested in improving their career.
GPM: But how can the average guitarist go about deciphering odd meters?
Frank Zappa: Well, let me put it this way: If you're going to go out of the norm, go *all* the way. Don't go out just a little bit. If you're scared to go out there, stay in the norm; just learn to play really well in 4/4. But if you want to go beyond that, you've got to set your mind to going in a totally different direction. If you want to count odd meters, they're all broken down into groups of twos and threes.
GPM: So, as you take the quarter note of a half-note triplet, and divide them into groups of 3, 5, and 7, for instance, you produce tinier subdivisions.
Frank Zappa: It's not just tinier subdivisions. *Ritards* [*ritardandos,*or periods of slowing down],and *accelerandos* [speeding up] inside of a bar, mathmatically worked out so that instead of *bomp, bomp, bomp, bomp*- four beats in a bar- you get another kind of action, where the time inside of a bar goes faster, goes slower, and goes faster again. But it comes out on the downbeat of the next bar. So if you're tapping your foot to it, you can still tap your foot to it; You're going to come out on the downbeat of the next bar.
GPM: Did you write out parts for the other players in advance?
Frank Zappa: Well, most of the songs on the guitar albums are improvisations, with the exception of "The Deathless Horsie", "Treacherous Cretins", and "Five Five FIVE". Those were heads that were rehearsed, but the parts were never written out- they were parts that you just hum to them: "And it goes like *this*". That's the way they were learned, and the rest of the stuff was all just solos.
GPM: Did you transcribe the pieces yourself?
Frank Zappa: No. I couldn't. There's *no way*. The only person I know who can do that is Steve Vai. He transcribes all that stuff, and it's amazingly accurate. In fact, he recently transcribed a vocal piece that I did, and then learned it on the guitar. The difficult part of the vocal piece is that there is no steady rhythm track underneath it. That makes it even rougher. After he transcribed it, he came in and played the guitar along with what I sang, so it sounds kind of like a *George-Benson-from-Venus*-type thing. He's done it with this piece and another called "The Jazz Discharge Party Hats". So he knows what he's doing when he writes the stuff down. And I've seen him get into violent arguments with various people who say, "This can't be right, what you've done here." And he pretty much stands behind every note that he's done. The things are constantly being checked and proofread. The best way to proofread them, of course, is to learn to play them all over again on another instrument, and then play along with the tape to see whether it's totally correct. I would say that most of Steve's transcriptions are ninety to ninety-five percent correct.
Next month: Creating a solo frome modes and developing a harmonic attitude.
(Donated from the collection of Roger Talkington.)

Absolutely Frank

Putting Some Garlic In Your Playing

From “Guitar Player” magazine, December 1982

Do you base your solos on linear progressions or boxy patterns?

You must understand: I don't practice, I'm not accurate, and I just play what I imagine at the time that I'm doing the solo. I mean, I listen to "Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar" now, and I can hear where I missed some of the notes going up, but you get the musical idea of what it's supposed to be. It's showing you a type of musical architecture. It's drawing you a picture. You know, it's the rise that's going up and then after that there's another part of it that comes down. It's drawing you a picture of something.

Does it bother you if you miss a note?

Well, I'm not going to commit suicide over it. I'm sure that there are perfect guitar players out there someplace, but I'll guarantee you they ain't going to play like that. I'll go out on a musical limb; I'll go out and try it. Why not? What have I got to lose? I'm not famous; I'm an unknown guitar player. Nobody's going to punch my scorecard the wrong way or give me brown stars if I screw up. Big deal. I'll take the chances. The rest of the guys that have the big reputations have to always play exactly in their style and do it right, and make sure it comes out perfect! What I do sort of sounds like the record. But usually what you get in other performances of guitar stuff on records is lacking in something. Vinnie Colaiuta has an expression; he says, "It has no garlic on it." You know, there's plenty of garlic on the Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar albums. They take chances and go out there and try things that polite society would probably rather ignore.

What was the basis for the solo in "Hog Heaven" [Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar, Barking Pumpkin, BPR 1111]?

It's just an improvisation. It's communication between me and the drummer and the bass player. It's in E lydian mode.

Do you generally think in terms of modes?

No. This just happened to be in a mode. The tonality is E lydian, although there are a few deviations.

What kind of mode did you use in "Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar"?

Basically, it's C lydian. I was just playing what was in my imagination at the time that it was happening. I didn't have a strict part worked out at all. I don't practice solos or anything like that. I just go for it.

Your solos are often built over vamps.

Right. I don't like chord changes. I like to have one tonal center that stays there, or possibly with a second chord that varies off the main tonal center. And then I play around that. I don't know if you ever listen to Indian music – there are no chord changes in that, but you can hear implications of all kinds of other chord changes and lines that are played against each other. That's the way I like to work. There's a little four-note vamp in "Treacherous Cretins" [Shut Up `N Play Yer Guitar] that implies Dm and A chords. It creates a harmonic climate. I don't think of them as a chord change. Instead, I look at the whole as a harmonic climate or harmonic attitude that sets up a mood – the combination of the alternation of those two chords. And so I just play inside of that attitude.

Do you think of the two chords as separate entities or as one massive chord that contains all the notes of the two chords?

Both ways. You can play against them both ways, because they're alternating – they never really happen at the same time. But you can play lines that include the notes of both chords. You get to play C sharps and C naturals in that way.

[Ed. Note: A book containing transcriptions of 22 of Frank Zappa's guitar solos, entitled The Frank Zappa Guitar Book, is now available. Published by Munchkin Music, this 304-page collection features selections from seven of Frank's LPs, including the Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar series. There are also black and white photos. The retail price is $14.95. For ordering information, contact Hal Leonard Publishing Corp., 8112 W. Bluemound Rd., Milwaukee, WI 53213. Another note: The music presented in this monthly question/answer column has been transcribed by Steve Vai and is meticulously prepared by David Ocker.]

Read by OCR software. If you spot errors, let me know afka (at) afka.net

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"I'm Different" or "Not Exactly Duane Allman"

Guitar Player Magazine: February, 1983
by Tom Mulhern

Without Frank Zappa, where would popular music be? Most likely, right where it is - or very close. That is to say, his approach to music - complex, unpredictable, and often cynical - doesn't quite fint in with the pre-programmed mainstream of pop music. Elements of all types of music, including contemporary classical, jazz, heavy metal, and practically every other recognizable form are employed with equal aplomb in Zappa's work. In the last 16 years, the 42-year-old guitaristl/composer/producer has completed 35 LPs -- among them double albums -- and there's a raft of material still awaiting mixdown and pressing. He has amused millions, and become legendary for the finely honed (some would say offensive) sense of humor in his songs. His fans are devout. Although other people simply don't like him, in many cases their opinions are formed solely upon the basis of what they've heard about him, rather than as a reaction to his music. (In a 1979 interview with Record Review Magazine, he said, "Most of 'em don't know what I do, but they know my name.") On one occasion, the criticism went beyond mere displeasure: While performing in London in 1971, he was pushed from a stage by an irate member of the audience, and suffered a compound leg fracture and many bruises.

While his reputation is worldwide (largely as a result of onstage antics, biting social commentary, and his lampooning of music, musicians, and music consumers), his work has made hardly a ripple in the pop realm -- which is just fine, as far as Frank is concerned. In fact, operating outside the slick, trendy format constraints of pop music - AM radio in particular -- has afforded him the freedom to write and perform exactly what he wants, without having to resort to drastically altering his direction every time the public's whims shift. Sure, he's had a few semi-hits: "Don't Eat the Yellow Snow" [from Apostrophe], "Dancin' Fool" [Sheik Yerbouti), "I Don't Wanna Get Drafted" [You Are What You Is], and of course the legendary "Valley Girl" [Ship Arriving Too Late to Save a Drowning Witch], However, airplay for the overwhelming majority of his hundreds of songs has been sporadic at best.

As a result of his low visibility in the mainstream of Top 40 pop, one might be inclined to think that he's gone nowhere and that he's had no substantial impact on music. Wrong on both counts. Zappa has been putting out records for longer than most other artists, and he has also been far more prolific than his contemporaries. A few of his LPs have even been certified for gold record status. Someone is buying his material. He has also been responsible for some unheralded ground-breaking. In 1966 he simuitaneously introduced the concept album and the double album with the Mothers Of Invention's debut LP, Freak Out! In 1968 he dared to parody the mighty Beatles' Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band with his We're Only in It For the Money.

Early in his musical pursuits, Frank developed an avid interest in composers Edgard Varese, Igor Stravinsky, and Anton Webern, whose non-traditional uses of harmony, rhythm, and orchestration had a profound impact on his approach to writing. In 1968, Lumpy Gravy spotlighted his incorporation of various idioms; it featured 50 musicians (among them guitarists Tommy Tedesco, Al DeMiola, Tony Rizzi, and Dennis Budimir), as well as a 16-piece string section. His orchestral pursuits have continued. As of this writing, the London Symphony is scheduled to perform several of his pieces on January 11 [1983] and record them shortly thereafter. Other symphonic works are scheduled for premieres:

The Sinister Footwear, which is to be premiered by the Berkeley Symphony and the Oakland Ballet in 1984, as well as a specially written work called The Perfect Stranger, which is to be conducted by renowned composer/conductor Pierre Boulez in the same year.

Frank also incorporated elements of jazz into rock long before it was fashionable; listen, for example, to his 1968 Hot Rats LP. Throughout his career he has brought together well-known and soon-to-be-well-known high-caliber musicians such as guitarist Adrian Belew, bassist Jack Bruce, keyboardist George Duke, drummer Aynsley Dunbar, and violinist Jean-Luc Ponty. Frank has also made a few movies, including 200 Motels and Baby Snakes (the soundtrack of the latter is due for release sometime this year), and is currently editing miles of videotape for future presentation.

What about his guitar playing? He's done a great deal, and provides most of the band's g-string solos while on tour. He's a stickler for the right tone, and thrives on a sound that laps against feedback. However, he doesn't view himself as a guitar hero. Almost paradoxically, then, he assembled the three-album Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar, a set of instrumentals that spotlights his fingerboard excursions. Transcriptions of many of his solos have been prepared for publication under the title The Frank Zappa Guitar Book [Hal Leonard]. Zappa produced these as a resuit of thousands of requests from guitarists who wanted huge doses of his playing. Besides providing these for his guitar-playing followers, each month he addresses questions on his compositional and instrumental approaches in his monthly Guitar Player column, "Non-Foods."

Since he was last interviewed in Guitar Player [Jan. '77], Frank has found less and less time to devote to the guitar, and only practices before touring. His love for the instrument remains undiminished, but the job of composing, managing his Barking Pumpkin Records, recording and mi~ing albums, and otherwise making sure that his business is running smoothly, requires constant vigilance. Lawsuits brought by Zappa against Warner Bros. (his record distributor until 1977) over the unauthorized release of his Zappa in New York, Sleep Dirt, Studio Tan, and Orchestral Favorites, also tied up a great deal of his time. Some peripheral suits are still unresolved. Nevertheless, despite all of his other work, he still produces albums: the most recent one, The Man From Utopia, is due early this year.

In the following interview, the multifaceted Frank Zappa describes the motivation behind his zeal for composing, how he approaches the recording and record-making process, and why he feels that the video explosion may not be the boon that many guitarists think it is.

Q:Why are you such a prolific composer?
FZ:I'm different.

Q:Do you have an inherent desire to put out a lot of records?
FZ:Well, the putting out of the material is not the desired end result. I mean, I really don't care whether it comes out, I like to hear it. I write because I am personally amused by what I do, and if other people are amused by it, then it's fine. If they're not, then that's also fine. But I do it for my own amusement. The fact that it comes out is just something that has to do with the business world, rather than the artistic world. Even if I wasn't releasing records I would still do it.

Q:How do you budget your time between audio and video recording and composing?
FZ:The composing actually takes up the smallest amount of my time. I wish I could spend more time doing it, but for everything that you write down, that engenders 20 other mechanical procedures further down the line that you have to go through in order to hear what you wrote. So I've pretty much limited the amount that I write. I've already written so much that hasn't gone through all those in-between steps before it turns into music on

tape, or music in the air, or whatever, that I could sit still for five years and have tons of stuff coming out.

Q:Do you spend much time, then, working with your guitar?
FZ:Hardly ever touch it. The only time I play my guitar is when I know I'm going to tour. I practice a little bit before we go into rehearsal to get the calluses built up again. Then I play during rehearsals, and when we get out on the road, I usually practice an hour a day before each show. Once the tour is over, I don't touch it. I haven't touched my guitar for about six months.

Q:Do you miss playing guitar at all?
FZ:In a way, yes; in a way, no. I really like the instrument and I really like to play, but when the responsibility for running the business rests on my shoulders, there isn't any time to practice. There's no time for the kind of guitar player enjoyment that the readers of your magazine might imagine a person would indulge in. If you really love the guitar, then you're going to spend every waking hour stroking the thing and playing through peculiar rituals.

Q:Is your having to devote more of your energies to other projects besides playing guitar the reason why you have other guitarists in your band?
FZ:No. What usually happens is this: If I put another guitarist on my album, I hire that person because he plays things that I can't play. And if the music requires a certain type of performance, and the composition is the real crux of the biscuit, then you don't want to be unfair to the composition and play it yourself if you're going to play it wrong. So I get people who can do it. It's not a matter of being lazy: If there's something on a given song that I think is in my department, I'm going to play it. But if it's something that will be difficult or impossible for me to do, I'd just as soon get somebody who feels comfortable with that style and have them do it.

Q:In concert, you often put down your guitar altogether.
FZ:Right. There's a good reason for that: I'm not a very good singer and I don't have very good breath control. And the weight of the guitar on your shoulder pushes down on your lungs. I find it easier to sing in tune with the other guys onstage if I don't have that weight on my body. It's easier to take it off, and it also allows me to give it to a roadie to tune it up, rather than be standing there with a prop like the Bruce Springsteen syndrome: swinging your guitar around your back just so you look good with a guitar on. Why dirty up the arrangement, which is planned to be concise and accurate, by randomly whacking a couple of chords or a couple of extra tweezy notes just because that's what everybody else would do? The music isn't designed that way. That's not the reason why I have the thing out there. It's something to make music on. And I really don't care what I look like out there as long as I can get my work done.

Q:Is the weight factor behind your choice of small guitars?
FZ:Yes. I have three of them, and I don't wear them: I play them. I have one Strat and two baby Les Pauls. They were made by D'Mini. (Ed. Note: These models are called the Les Paule and the Strate by their manufacturer, Phased Systems.] The D'Mini Strat that I have is unbelievable; you can't believe the noises that come out of that thing. It's ridiculous. I'm having a special one made with a little bit deeper body on it so that I can have a locking vibrato put on.

Q:How are those guitars tuned?
FZ:The little Les Pauls are tuned up to A, and the Strat is tuned to F#. The relationship

between the strings is the same as on a standard guitar.

Q:Are special strings used on those guitars?
FZ:On the little Strat I use Gold Maxima strings. On the little Les Pauls, I use Black Maximas, which are Teflon-coated. They don't make them anymore, but I had a lot of them lying around. The upper unwound strings are platinum-plated.

Q:What modifications have you had done to your D'Mini Strate?
FZ:The neck and body are stock, and it has Seymour Duncan pickups, and a built-in parametric equalizer with variable "Q" [resonance]; that's the one with the concentric knobs. It was custom-designed here at the Utility Muffin Research Kitchen [Zappa's studio/workshop]. There's a volume control and a silver plug that takes the place of another parametric that failed when I was out on the road. It has a three-way selector, and the toggle switch used to be for switching between the two parametrics. By having two parametrics, I was able to preset two different types of feedback boost. The circuit boards were worked on by Midget Sloatman and Eddie Clothier. David Robb. who was the guitar tech on the last tour, also did some work on it.

Q:In generating your pieces, what comes first?
FZ:Every song is different. It just depends on what it's eventually going to wind up being. It could start off with just two or three words. And I always write a few songs when I'm out on the road.

Q:Do you start with a rhythmic framework?
FZ:Songs that are basically vocal-oriented, I usually start off with a story idea or just a phrase. There's one song I made up on the last tour called "Baby Take Your Teeth Out." Just those words turned into a song. Other ways: You can start off with something from a sound check, where you're playing a few chords while warming up. You say, "Those chords sound good," and the next step is to decide what you're going to do with it. That's for the most basic type of material -the easy stuff where you can just hum it to the band and say, "Okay, I'm doing this, you do that, you play this beat, and you come in here." That's the easy way of putting rock and roll together. The compositions on paper are done a totally different way.

Q:To put together the type of song where you can just hum the words, do you sit at the piano and arrange?
FZ:I very seldom touch a piano unless I'm writing stuff for orchestra. That's the only time I need it. I can just sit in an airport and write it down on paper, too. Some of the pieces to be performed by the London Symphony were written in airports or hotel rooms, with no appliances whatsoever.

Q:Once you get a piece composed -- especially something on a grand scale such as an orchestral work - do you make a demo tape for yourself to see ifyou like the final composition?
FZ:No. What I usually do is come back from a tour with a briefcase full of sketches and I'll test the parts of the harmony and the lines on the piano, refine it, and then generate a handwritten score in fairly messy condition, which I then give to the copyist I have on the payroll. He'll ink it and copy the parts, and it's done. Usually, something that complicated doesn't roll very fast, such as this orchestral stuff we've been trying to get played for about five years now.

Q:What pieces will be included in your orchestral set? Will The Sinister Footwear be

included?
FZ:No. The Sinister Footwear is going to receive its world premiere in the spring of 1984 with the Berkeley Orchestra and the Oakland Ballet Company.

Q:Is it difficult to line up these concerts?
FZ:Part of the problem is that we've been promised performances by certain other people at certain other times who want to do premieres. This included [composer/conductor] Pierre Boulez, who commissioned one piece. That's set for January 9, 1984, in Paris; it's a piece called The Perfect Stranger. It was written for his little orchestra, a 29- or 30-piece group. I wrote three pieces to be performed with that orchestration. Right now, we don't have any guarantee that even if he conducts the premiere that it will get recorded. And I'm interested in getting it recorded so that I can hear it. It's never enough just to hear it played once live in a hall. You may be able to listen to the stuff carefully so that you can go further and advance your craftsmanship, but it's just a little bit hard to do that by hearing it only once, so I do want to get it recorded.

Q:Who will be performing your pieces?
FZ:We were planning to have them done with the Syracuse Symphony, but we have since made other arrangements with the London Symphony. So we will be doing a concert at a hall called the Barbican on January 11, in London, followed by three days of digital recording. The pieces to be played, in order, are "Envelopes," "Mo 'n Herb's Vacation," "Bob in Dacron," "Sad Jane," "Pedro's Dowry," and "Bogus Pomp." Here are the instruments that are going to be in the orchestra: 12 first violins, 12 second violins, 12 violas, 12 cellos, eight basses, one harp, one piano, five flutes, four oboes, five clarinets, including Eb clarinet, bass clarinet, and contrabass clarinet, five bassoons, one of which stays on contrabassoon all the time and another that doubles contrabassoon, eight French horns, four trumpets, four trombones, one bass trombone, one tuba, one set of timpani, six percussion, and a drum set.

Q:Will any members of your regular band be included?
FZ:From the United States, I'm bringing with me Ed Mann, our regular percussion ist, and Chad Wackerman, our regular drummer, as well as David Ocker, who is going be playing the clarinet solo in "Mo 'n Herb's Vacation." The conductor will be Kent Nagano, who is currently the conductor of the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra. I'm taking Mark Pinske, the engineer who also did all the live stuff on the last tour. And the whole thing is going to cost us far less than what it would have cost us in Syracuse.

Q:Who will take on the expense?
FZ:Well, the entire orchestral thing is on my own budget. I've had requests from orchestras all over the world asking to play music, but basically it comes down to one thing: They want me to pay for it. Because once it's recorded, they all want to get recording scale for doing it -- 110 people. We're talking basically about several recording sessions for 110 people. If you were to do that in Hollywood, and say, "Okay, I'm going to do five or six sessions with 110 guys," and have them come in and sight-read it, I don't think you would get a good performance out of it. What I'm hoping to do is have them rehearse it for about a week, and it may turn into something that they will keep in their repertoire, and it will continue to be played especially after the record comes out because then it will be something that will sell tickets for them.

Q:What kind of material will be on your new album?
FZ:The new album will have "The Man from Utopia Meets Mary Leu," a medley of two rhythm and blues songs from the '50s drastically rearranged. "Mary Lou" was written by

Young Jesse, and "The Man from Utopia" is by Donald and Doris Wood. That's followed by "Stick Together," a song about union stupidity. It goes into "Sex," which is followed by "The Jazz Discharge Party Hats," and is then followed by an instrumental, "We Are Not Alone." Side two starts off with "Cocaine Decisions," followed by "The Dangerous Kitchen," then "Tink Walks Amok," an instrumental featuring Arthur Barrow playing three basses doing some strange things. Next is "The Radio Is Broken," a song about a science fiction movie, and the last song on the side is "Moggio," which is a very complicated instrumental for the full ensemble, featuring Steve Vai playing some very hard guitar stuff.

Q:How well have the Shut Up 'n PlayYer Guitar records sold?
FZ:Good. Actually, they have surprised everybody because the quantity that we sold mail order went into a profit within two weeks of being out there. That is, they paid for the cost of manufacturing within two weeks. At the same time, the contract with CBS was structured like this: They had the right to put the records out outside of the United States as a commercial release, and they put them in a three-record boxed set. That did really well in Europe, and suddenly they started importing them into the United States. So all the people who purchased them mail-order were saying, "Hey, look. It's in the store in a nice boxed set and we were buying them as three individual records through the mail." I didn't have any control over it. There was no way I could stop what was happening, so the only thing I could do was put it out as a commercial release myself in the U.S.

Q:Is it doing well as a set?
FZ:Well, they pressed 5,000 sets to begin with, and they went immediately like that [snaps fingers]. So, they ordered another 7,000. It's kind of an unusual item since it is fairly expensive, it's in a box, it's hard to rack, and you wouldn't think there'd be much demand for it because it is instrumental music by some guy who is not normally recognized as being a musician. People think of me as some kind of deranged comedian. So CBS was kind of surprised that there were that many orders coming in.

Q:Do you plan to come out with follow-ups to the Shut Up 'n Play Yer Guitar series?
FZ:I could; a lot depends on the final resuits of the sales of these. Because, as I've said in many interviews before, I'm not funded by any foundation or grants or any money from the sky, so what comes in gets transferred again into the next product that goes out. And I can only spend the money to make the next product vs. the profit that comes in on the previous one. I have to budget my time to work on certain things that are going to perpetuate my payroll for the 30 some-odd people who are working around here. And unless the guitar album sells a lot of units, that would be a luxury in terms of the time spent on another one. It's a big project to edit that stuff together, follow it through the mastering process, and all that. It takes quite a while. And once I start working on a project, I don't do anything else. I just do that until it's done.

Q:How do you determine which guitarist in your band does what part, and do you record several solo tracks on a song and edit them together?
FZ:It depends on whether it's a studio song or a live song.

Q:Some of your songs are mixtures of live and studio recordings.
FZ:Okay, then that's a third category. But we're talking about the solos now. In the case of a live take, I will find a solo that I like from a live performance and edit it. I wouldn't play any extra on it, I would just shorten it to fit the time frame that it's supposed to function in. And as far as the ones in the studio go, I very seldom play studio guitar solos. On the Drowning Witch album, the solo on "I Come from Nowhere" was a studio solo, and that was like two hours worth of work to get a sound that I thought was suitable. And then

about 20 minutes worth of playing: punching in or doing a take and not liking it and wiping the whole thing, or fixing part of it, or just tweezing it up.

Q:Do you usually wait until after you've edited a part to add the effects?
FZ:Not necessarily. Sometimes I record with the effects, and sometimes they're added later. It just depends.

Q:Steve Vai said that the "Peter Gunn-sounding" guitar in "Teenage Prostitute" [Drowning Witch] sounded much different after it was mixed than when he recorded it.
FZ:We can change the sound of just about anything because we have a lot of sound modifying tools in the studio. When you arrange something, the arrangement is always modified by what comes before it or after it on a side. If you want the side to play smoothly, you may equalize all the different parts of a tune to sound one way, but when you start mixing a whole side -- that's what we do: We start on song one and work through to the end -- to make the continuity work in terms of the tonal quality of the whole side, sometimes we have to change things around drastically.

Q:Then you don 't follow a brittle-sounding song with a mushy one.
FZ:Right. You want to smooth out the whole spectrum so that when a person puts the needle down at the beginning of the record, they feel that there's a continuity through the whole side. It just makes it easier to listen to.

Q:What's the biggest problem in creating a record from a final tape?
FZ:The biggest problem about making a record occurs when you go from the magnetic medium to the mechanical medium. Sound on tape has certain problems that you have to deal with just because of the way that tape works. Sound on a disc has other types of problems that you have to correct because of the way a record works. A record is a mechanical medium -- it's based on a little thing wiggling around in a groove. And it's a miracle that a stylus can actually produce music -- especially when you're talking about things that are drastically stereo-imaged. You get into situations with phase cancellation and all sorts of weird stuff that goes on when you try to put it onto a record. And there are always equalization changes between when you finish your master tape and when you send it down and get a ref [reference copy]. It never sounds the same when it comes back from the disc cutting place. And so you have to take the time and tweeze it up. Sometimes there are problems on the tape that just can't be fixed.

Q:What are some examples?
FZ:Those problems usually involve the letter "S" in a vocal part, or a hi-hat that's half open. Those things are sometimes really obnoxious on a record. And the remedies just to fix that kind of sound -- just to get it to track correctly on a disc -- involve radical measures, such as using these things called acceleration limiters, which are built into the recording lathe. These are pretty drastic. Let's take a bad "S" in a word like surprise. It sounds okay on tape, but when it comes back on a record, it's all distorted because it's difficult for the needle to track it. So you either have to use an outboard de-esser [an electronic device that senses powerful highs and selectively chops them out], which finds that frequency and suppresses it for an instant, or use the acceleration limiters on the lathe.

Q:How do they work?
FZ:They function very drastically. They start at 4k [4,000 cycles per second], and at that point when an "S" appears, they dump the whole top end. So. when it's triggered, it takes the whole top off the tape, and not just the "S." So it's very critical to tweak those things.

The guy who cuts the lacquers [the earliest disc in the mastering process] for us is very careful about leaving it on when it's time to get rid of the S's, and turning it off right afterwards. It makes for a lot of manual work, and in order to do it, he works from a sheet of paper with timing numbers. So he'll, say, at one minute and 28 seconds turn on the high-frequency limiter to "4," look at the timer, and turn it on at the right time. He doesn't listen to the music, he does it by the numbers. Just turns it on and off. The easy way to do it is to turn on the high-frequency limiter and leave it on. There won't be any S's on the record, but there won't be any top end on it either. We fuss with that type of stuff. We have 30 or 40 refs for the new album [The Man from Utopia] and most people don't do that; they do one, and that's it.

Q:Do you prefer to have your records done with half-speed mastering?
FZ:The only album that we ever did with half-speed mastering was Joe's Garage. It helps your top end, but it ruins the low end. Let's examine the frequency spectrum of what we're putting on the record. The new album has a lot of information around 30 cycles [Ed. Note: Low E on a bass guitar is 41.2 Hz], and there's a very full sounding bottom on some of these tunes. If you were to master that at half-speed, you'd need an equalizer that would have to be looking at 15 cycles. So you get a crisper, but a thinner-sounding record ifyou master at half-speed. On the Joe's Garage albums, we used half-speed mastering on all three of those discs, and I'm not totally delighted with the results.

Q:Do you have any examples?
FZ:Let me give you a very graphic one. We cut it at half-speed, and the stylus can carve very careful, perfect, little high-frequency wiggles on the record. That doesn't mean when it's turned into a stamper and goes onto vinyl that those wiggles are necessarily going to be there. You may just be fooling yourself. You may hear it great coming off of a reference disc, but not off of a pressing. And that's what I think happened with Joe's Garage. It just didn't carry through all the manufacturing processes. Recently, I've cut some normal-speed refs on the Joe's Garage albums, and since the time of the original mastering, there have been some advancements in normal-speed lathe technology. You can get more level on the record, and so forth. So the new refs sound fantastic. They have plenty of top end and plenty of bottom; they sound much more like the master tape than the half-speed version did.

Q:In terms of stereo imaging, do you have to make trade-offs when mixing guitar or other parts in order to avoid phase cancellation when the music is played back in mono?
FZ:Who listens to it in mono?

Q:Many engineers play music through small speakers in mono occasionally to hear what it might sound like on a car radio.
FZ:But I don't have that problem, because nobody's ever going to be playing my stuff on an AM radio, so what's the difference? And besides, I believe that most of the people who buy my records have better-than-average reproduction equipment. They may not be in the audiophile class, but I don't believe they listen to them on mono cheese-o equipment. So I try to go as stereo as possible and plan it for the end result of who's going to consume it. Nobody's going to take "Heavy Duty Judy" [Shut Up 'n Play Yer Guitar] and play it on mainstream AM radio.

Q:The Drowning Witch album had a suggestion on it to the effect that it should be listened to on JBL 4311 speakers. Why so specific?
FZ:That album was mixed on 4311s, and it sounds better through 4311s than just about

any other kind of speaker. It was the first time I've done that. I heard a lot of people own those kinds of speakers, and I thought, "Well, maybe we can optimize it for what is actually in their homes." One of the problems when you make a record is that you don't know actually what they're going to be playing it on. You don't know what the anomalies of the person's speakers are going to be -- or the cartridge, or the condition of the stylus, or whether they like to turn up the bass all the way. All these things. Everything that happens changes the sound of what you put onto the tape, and there's no way to make it perfect, unless the listener has some kind of scientifically flat reproduction system in their home. And that's just not going to happen.

Q:What becomes of your band during a hiatus from touring?
FZ:Well, whenever we go off the road, there isn't any band. Everybody is hired for the tour; nobody is on a yearly salary. I used to do it differently years ago: Everybody was employed, and they got the same amount of money every week whether they worked or not. And some of the guys said, "I'd rather get paid more money just for the time I'm on the road." And I said, "Fine," and that's the way it is now. So when they're not on the road with me, they go out and do other work. It's going to be a while before I'm back on the road, so it's good they have other work.

Q:Are you just trying to clear out the backlog of tapes, compositions, and other business?
FZ:Oh, it's a lot of different factors. I have a lot of things to do that can't be done while you're on the road. We've got video and movie stuff happening right now, and you can't be a touring musician and still have control over that stuff.

Q:What prompted you to put out the book of solo transcriptions?
FZ:There were lots of requests for it. We've got over a thousand postcards from people interested in that type of music: It's really thick: it looks just like a little telephone book. And that's not even all the stuff that's on the guitar albums.

Q:Do you ever listen to your older material to pull things out for use as a catalyst for new pieces?
FZ:Well, I'll be listening to those things a whole lot because we plan to re-release the entire catalog of my albums next May. We're remixing everything. As a matter of fact, the board is set up to remix The Mothers, Fillmore East - June 1971, and what we've been able to do to that album is science fiction. You can't even believe it. It doesn't even resemble the original.

Q:Will the albums hold basically the same material?
FZ:I'm going to add to it. The whole idea of this package is. . . . I don't know whether we'll be able to pull it off in time because there's an awful lot of work to be done to meet the deadline, but I'm hoping by Mother's Day to have five boxes with seven albums in each of them, covering the entire catalog. And we'll divide them up so that the first box is like all the early Mothers stuff plus one extra disc of material from that era that's never been released before. And the same goes for the rest of the boxes: Each will have one disc of things that were done during that time that never got released.

Q:So they're not just the same records in a new package?
FZ:All the stuff is either going to be remastered, as is the case with the things that already have a good mix, or completely remixed. This includes 4-track, early 8-track, or early 16-track -- or anything done when science wasn't there to make it sound right.

Q:Your music embraces satire and complex rhythmic and harmonic concepts. Where do you derive your ideas from? Do you watch a lot of TV or hang out in unusual settings?
FZ:I do not hang out anywhere but my own house, and the TV I get to watch is usually the late-night stuff. And I like to watch the news.

Q:Do you have any favorite contemporary musicians?
FZ:No.

Q:Are there any that you severely dislike?
FZ:No. I think that if a person is making music -- even if it's the most crass, commercial kind of crud -- that person should be doing that because there are people who want to consume crass, commercial crud. And they're doing a necessary function for the audience that needs to be entertained. Just because I'm not the consumer of that stuff, it's no reason for me to go on some big campaign against it. I don't think it's particularly aesthetic, but then again, if it's providing enjoyment for somebody, then fine.

Q:So for you it's easier to ignore it.
FZ:Well, I'm not a consumer of pop music. I don't listen to the radio. I don't go to see groups. I don't buy albums. I've got too much other stuff to do; that world is not for me. I'm not interested.

Q:How important do you think the video medium is becoming for music?
FZ:It's becoming more important for the people who own the cable companies because the artists who are doing the video things are being ripped off. And here's how the rip-off works: If you're a person who has a band, and you make a video, you do this because you think if you get your video on TV, everybody will go out and buy your album and think you're fantastic. And this myth is perpetuated by cable companies who show these things, but they don't pay you. And it costs a lot of money to make these videos.

Q:They don 't have to pay ASCAP or BMl for performance rights?
FZ:Well, when you consider what it costs to make a video vs. what they have to pay any performing rights society, you can see it's not even close. Look, a decent-looking video is going to cost you $40,000 or $50,000; some groups have spent $150,000 for just a few minutes' worth of video. So the way it usually goes, some record companies will put up the money to begin with to make the video. But that's only like going to the bank to get a loan, because the real cost of the video comes out of the artist's pocket. The record company deducts all that out of the artist's royalties, if there are any. Before the artist sees a nickel for his work, the record company makes sure they get their investment back for making the video. The artist is really the one who has to pay for that advertising, ultimately. And in most record contracts, any money that is spent promoting the product comes out of the artist's pocket -- usually by some roundabout accounting method. They cover it up, but you're paying. No record company does you any favors. Then, to add insult to injury, the cable companies that show these things never give any money for this material. And what it does for them is fill up their air time with colorful pieces of videotape and they get to sell commercials; they get revenues from advertisers who want to have their spots included in the middle of all this colorful musical videotape menagerie, and the cable company gets a free ride.

Q:And their production costs are zip.
FZ:That's right. All they do is sit there and wait for the cassettes to roll in, because all these groups want to get their things on TV. They think, "Oh, boy, we're really going to be

famous now." And they're getting hosed.

Q:So the only one benefitting, then, is the guy sitting at home watching.
FZ:Well, no. Because he doesn't make any money from it. The cable company that sells commercials for the thing is really benefitting, and the guy sitting at home may or may not get any benefit from it because the cable company is only going to show those videos which are tame -- within a certain framework. You know, the weirder stuff never gets on. It's the same as the control they have on AM radio. It's all formatted to look and feel a certain way.

Q:How do you think the video medium will affect guitarists in general?
FZ:If you have to function in a visual medium, you're going to wind up doing things that look good instead of sound good. I mean, you can be playing the most beautiful music in the world, but if you're just sitting there like a lump, that really doesn't stimulate the video viewer, nor does it stimulate the guy who programs the videotapes. And it probably won't even get on the air.

Q:So it's time to do cartwheels.
FZ:That's right. Make faces, jump up and down. . . .

Q:What do you think of the fire-breathing young guitar players who play in the Randy Rhoads vein?
FZ:Randy Rhoads was my son Dweezil's favorite guitar player. He really loved Randy. For the people who love that kind of music, there should be those types of guitar players doing that kind of stuff to entertain them.

Q:Do you think young guitarists who start by learning every flashy technique are missing anything by not learning basics such as blues a la Elmore James?
FZ:Well, Elmore James is an acquired taste, and I happen to really like Elmore James, and I like all blues-type guitar players and all that sort of stuff. I happen to think that what they play really means something, as opposed to most of what happens on most rock and roll records -- it's very calculated sound effects that fit the song. But to say that a person has to start with Elmore James before he graduates up to fire-breathing guitar playing status is stupid, because you really don't need to. If you don't have any feeling for that type of music, why involve yourself with it? I would rather see a guitar player totally ignore that realm of music in an honest way -- saying, "That's just not my stuff" -- than get a cursory glance of it and say, "Now I understand it," because they'll just do a parody of it. You've really got to love that stuff. I really hope that one of these days that sort of blues comes back. Everything else comes back. And I think that kind of music is great.

Q:But the recording of the great bulk of original old blues material isn't that great.
FZ:Well, I'm not talking about re-releasing those old things. I'm talking about the idea that a person can stand up there with a guitar and just play blues on it. Not just play mash and trash, but play the fucking blues, because it's good to listen to.

Q:Do you ever give Dweezil guitar tips?
FZ:He asked about some chords one time, and I showed him some. Other than that, he's pretty shy about asking me about stuff. He watches a lot of videotapes and he listens to a lot of heavy metal cassettes. His main interest is really heavy metal.

Q:So he doesn 't ask for guidance.
FZ:Well, I don't think there's any reason for him to want to play what I play, because it's not

his world. So he should go off on his own and get his own resources.

Q:Were your parents music fanatics?
FZ:No.

Q:Dweezil's situation is different in that he has a father who is a guitarist, and he aspires to be a guitarist; it seems like an entirely different ball game.
FZ:Well, every once in a while when his band's rehearsing, I'Il help them with the machinery they're using. Like, if they're having a problem getting a sound that they want, I'Il explain how equalizers work, and how to get certain sounds out of their equipment. But what he plays is his own business.

Q:What do you think would be a good guitar and amp complementfor a beginning guitarist?
FZ:Depends on what kind of music they want to play. If they want to be a fire-breathing guitar player, they go out and get a Marshall 100-watt and turn it all the way up. And a Stratocaster all the way up. What else do they need? Playing music is different, though. If you're just going to get started in that rock and roll world, that's the way it goes.

Q:What kind of hours do you generally keep?
FZ:I work until I can't stand it, and then I go to sleep. It varies from day to day. I've been working a few 20-hour days recently, but it's settled down to a mild 12 hours in the last couple of days.

Q:What was the full story on the Zappa in New York, Sleep Dirt, Orchestral Favorites, and Studio Tan albums? Usually your albums give full credits to the musicians and in many cases lyrics; however, on all but Zappa in New York there was nothing.
FZ:That was part of what started my lawsuit with Warner Bros. It's a really complicated legal story, and I don't want to recite it again. But the fact of the matter is that part of the lawsuit was settled out of court, and I got the rights to all of those masters back; I got all the tapes back. They're going to be part of the sets that are going to be remixed, remastered, and re-released.

Q:Do you foresee any way that musicians can avoid being burned by a record company?
FZ:No. Not unless that musician also happens to be a combination of expert lawyer and maybe a billionaire. Because the only way you can fight a record company is to be able to afford the legal battle that they'll whip on you. A company as big as Warner Bros. has lawyers from here to Pacoima. And all they do is smother you in paperwork, and then you have to wait five years before you go to court.

Q:Will the musicians from those albums be credited on the reissues?
FZ:Yeah. I don't know how familiar you are with the sound quality of those albums, but they're really disgusting. I've got some new refs of the same material made from the same masters, but done up to Barking Pumpkin standards, and they'll scare you to death. Because there's good music on those records; there's a lot lurking in there.

Q:How does somebody get to play guitar or bass for you?
FZ:If somebody has the desire to play guitar or bass for me at this moment in time, I would say just forget it. I'm not hiring.

Q:What about in the general sense?
FZ:In the general sense, anybody who has a job in the band got there through an audition.

Q:Do you hold large, open auditions, and put ads in music trade magazines?
FZ:No, because I would wind up auditioning a bunch of people who would do it just to say they auditioned, which would be like a professional credit feather in their cap. I don't want to have to sit through hundreds and hundreds of guys who really have no chance of getting in. You know, people are recommended by other people, or tapes are sent in, and I hear that there is some talent there suitable for working in the band. That's the way it's done. I have down people in from all over the country to try out if I thought that there was some chance. They're brought in and I pay for their ticket and their hotel, and then send them back if they flunk. I don't say, "You failed"; I always thank them for trying out, but you have to be honest about it.

Q:You change your personnel fairly often -- almost with each album.
FZ:Not really. Because the band that did the tour in Europe in 1982 was exactly the same band that was out on the U.S. tour the year before. You have to understand that when a guy comes into the band, he's not in indentured servitude for life. A lot of these people come in because they want to come in and do one semester and go out and have their big career. They use it as a stepping stone for someplace else to go. I can't make a guy stay in the band. If he wants to leave, he's free to leave anytime because I've got a drawer full of other applicants who want his job. That's just the way it is.

Q:Do you think that a lot of time is wasted by training new people?
FZ:Yes. There is a lot of time wasted, and it's a boring procedure. But then on the other hand, think what you gain. You get a chance to refine some of the things that have already been done. You might get a guy in there who's a lot more technically skillful than the one who left. And it also gives the ones who are still in the band a feeling of accomplishment because they're veterans now, and they play with a little bit more authority. So it's a refinement process.

Q:Of the many guitarists that you hired in recent years -- Adrian Belew, Warren Cucurullo, and Ray White -- what did you like about each one that made you want them in your lineup?
FZ:Adrian Belew, I thought, had potential to add something to the band as it was constituted at that time [1977], which was kind of a funny band. We blew out a lot of comedy stuff like "Punky's Whips" [only released on the first editions of Zappa in New York; otherwise unavailable]. That was the band that originated "Broken Hearts Are for Assholes" [Sheik Yerbouti] and that kind of material. And Adrian just fit in with that, and so that's why he got the job. And Warren Cucurullo was and still is a talented guitar player who had a desire to play standard repertoire songs he already knew from all the other albums. And he knew a lot of tunes; probably as many, if not more, than some of the other guys who were in the band at the time. And on the tour he did with us, we were doing a lot of the complicated songs off the records that people thought they would never hear on a stage. We were doing "Brown Shoes Don't Make It" [Tinsel-Town Rebellion], "Inca Roads," and "Andy" (the latter two from One Size Fits All]. We were doing a lot of hard repertoire. And he was good for that. Ray has been in the band twice. The first time, he felt a little bit out of place because he is an extremely religious person, and our band is not. And I think that there was some religious/emotional conflict the first time that he was in the band. He was always great: He had a good attitude about working and he did a good job. But I sensed that there was a certain amount of discomfort about him being in there vs. the type of material we were playing. So I let him go. And later on I said, well, why not try him

again, because I had a band that I thought his personality would fit in with. So I called him up, he came down and tried out, and it clicked right away. So he's been with me for the past two or three years.

Q:He's got a really good blues style.
FZ:He's wonderful; he just loves that kind of music.

Q:What attracted you to Steve Vai?
FZ:Steve Vai got the job because he sent a cassette and a transcription of "The Black Page" [Zappa in New York], and from hearing that, I could tell that he had a superior musical intelligence and very great guitar chops. And this showed me that there was a possibility to write things that were even harder for that instrument than what had already been used in the band. That's why he got the job.

Q:What do you look for in a guitar?
FZ:If you pick up a guitar and it says, "Take me, I'm yours," then that's the one for you. You don't go into a guitar store and say, "Hey, what a great paint job." You have to put it in your hand, because a real guitar that's going to be something you make music on -- as opposed to a piece of machinery that makes you look good onstage -- is going to have some relationship to your hand and body. It feels right when you pick it up. And that's the way I felt when I got the first SG that I had. It felt right in my hand, so I got it. Same thing with the Gibson Les Paul.

Q:Will you overlook such things as lousy pickups?
FZ:Well, you can always change the pickups.

Q:Do you collect guitars?
FZ:I don't go out and buy guitars all over the place. I'm not one of those kinds of guys. I do have a lot of guitars, but I don't know how I accumulated them. I've got about 25 guitars. They just keep piling up.

Q:Do you have a top five favorites?
FZ:I've got the Les Paul that I use. It was a brand-new guitar when I bought it. It's not a vintage thing. It was a very well made production-line Gibson Les Paul right off the rack

Q:You didn't go to the Gibson factory and have them build one to your specifications?
FZ:You know, considering how long I've been playing Gibson guitars, I've never spoken to or heard from anyone connected with that company. There's no factory connection with Gibson whatsoever. I also have a Stratocaster with a Foyd Rose Tremolo System I installed on it. It was the guitar that I used the most on the last European tour. And the Hendrix Strat [a burned Stratocaster formerly owned by Jimi Hendrix], which has a special neck on it. It's an SG-size neck. It does certain things that other guitars won't do. The width and depth of the neck is different from that of a Strat, so you can do all kinds of things that just don't feel right on another guitar.

Q:What distinguishes one instrument from another?
FZ:Each guitar has its own character and its own sounds that it likes to make that come naturally to that instrument. So I'm going to choose an instrument that matches the character of the song. I also have a Telecaster -- one of the copies of the originals that Fender put out about a year ago. It's a real good blues guitar. The fifth guitar would be the SG copy that I got from this guy in Phoenix, Arizona. It says "Gibson" on it, but it's

handmade, and it's got an ebony fretboard with 23 frets on it; it goes one fret higher than a normal SG. I play that a lot.

Q:Do you use the 23rd fret often?
FZ:Since the cutaways on that guitar are so deep, it's very easy to get up all the way to the top. So I can play higher on that one than on any of the other ones that I have.

Q:How many guitars do you usually take out on the road?
FZ:On the last tour, I took out a Fender XII 12-string, the Telecaster, the Les Paul, the Hendrix Strat, my old mirror-pickguard SG, and the Stratocaster with the Floyd Rose on it. Plus the mini Strat and the mini Les Paul. Right now the only thing I miss on my D'Minis is the vibrato arm.

Q:Do you use the vibrato that much?
FZ:On the last tour I used it to excess because the Floyd makes it possible to come back in tune after you go down to the subsonic regions. You can dump all the string slack and come back up and be in tune. And the way my Floyd is set up, you can go down two octaves practically, then back up to normal position, and then bend up a whole-step and sometimes even a third. It's balanced so well that I can just wiggle it a little bit and get a real nice vibrato.

Q:What kind of effects did you take out on the road with you on the last tour?
FZ:I took three MXR Digital Delays -- two with minimum memory storage, and one with tons of it. I also used two MicMix Dynaflangers. I didn't have any fuzztones or octave dividers. I used three different amps: a Marshall 100-watt, a Carvin, and an Acoustic -- and each was interfaced with a different digital delay. So I could store three different signals and get some weird sounds. For instance, you take your whammy bar and get some terrible tweezed noise, and store that. Then it would come out of the right, and another one would come out of the middie, and a third one would come out of the left one, and you could play over the top of it all. I've got a lot of recordings of that from the tour, and it's really an ungodly sound.

Q:Did you take a pedalboard on the last tour?
FZ:My setup was pretty basic for that particular tour. You see, things don't always go according to plan here at the Utility Muffin Research Kitchen. A very elaborate digital setup that had been in preparation for about six months prior to the tour turned up a semi-fatal design flaw, which was allowing some digital grit to get into the audio path, just at the last minute as we were getting ready to pack up. And a lot of the work on it had to be redone -- and it still isn't as perfect as I would like to have it before I take it anywhere. That particular rack had some unbelievable features, because it allowed you to do presets of any combination of effects that you might want with preset levels to each effect and preset control to all the parameters. So during the sound check, you could set one sound with a hanger and a fuzz and an octave divider and a [Mutron] Bi-Phase, and set all those parameters in a memory storage. And when you'd hit your switch, it would go exactly to that sound. With the use of a pedal you'd be able to crossfade to any other preset using any other combination of devices that you had in the rack. It was a really great idea, but so far we haven't gotten it perfected.

Q:You really put yourself at the mercy of that digital equipment on the road.
FZ:Well, I'm perfectly comfortable going out and doing a tour with nothing but an on/off switch on the amplifier. For much of the tour I wasn't using the effects at all. The only time I would turn them on at all was when it seemed appropriate for some event during a solo.

The guitar I played the most was my Strat with the Floyd Rose on it, and it was capable of such ungodly noises with the parametric EQ and the pickups that were in it. It made plenty of noises without any fuzztones or other crap.

Q:Did you use a Strat on the song "You Are What You Is" from You Are What You Is?
FZ:No. That's the Les Paul. I also used a Mu-tron Octave Divider.

Q:On "No Not Now" [Drowning Witch] there's an extremely distinctive bass line. Did you write it?
FZ:I just made it up. The bass part was done like this: Arthur Barrow came in to play bass and, bar by bar, I would hum it to him. We'd play it, and he'd go as far as he could, and then he'd make a mistake, and then I'd show him the next part, and then we'd punch him in. And that's how it was done: like eight bars at a time. It's a wonderful bass line.

Q:The entire album's bass lines are played up quite a bit. Did you purposely spotlight the bass on the album?
FZ:I think that's a result of mixing on the 4311s -- it just gets accentuated. It's up in the mix, but not to a radical extreme for a comfortable listening level. I like bass lines. They're good, because for people who don't understand what's going on in the rest of the song, there's always the bass line.

Q:What kind of effects did you use on the guitar throughout the album?
FZ:I used a MicMix Dynaflanger and Aphex compressors. The signal is compressed after the hanging. And the hanger is set to follow the envelope of the high-frequency decay, rather than the amplitude envelope.

Q:What kind of difference would that make?
FZ:It gives a totally different sound. It makes a more pillowy effect from that particular device.

Q:Why would you compress the signal after the flanger?
FZ:Well, for one thing, you would compress it if you didn't want more hanger cycle. And hangers boost certain frequencies in the midrange that go hog-wild if you don't control them. So we started off just to control those frequencies, and then by cranking that Aphex compressor to some ridiculous extent we got this other kluge sound.

Q:On "Valley Girl" there's some red-hot guitar way back in the mix. Why didn't you mix it up higher so that it could be more easily discerned
FZ:Because it conflicted with the vocal part. And that red-hot-sounding guitar was just me and the drummer jamming at three o'clock in the morning. That track was the basis for the song. It was a riff that started off at a soundcheck about a year before, and I had been piddling with it for a long time. One night, we finally did it, saved the tape, and little by little we added all of this other stuff to it, and we got "Valley Girl."

Q:The bass line was written later?
FZ:The bass line was never written. It was the last thing that was added to the track. The track didn't even have a bass part; it was just guitar and drums. And when Scott Thunes came in to do it, it was at a point where I thought if we left the guitar up high enough in the mix it would probably be thick enough where we wouldn't even need a bass. But the engineer, Bob Stone, said, "Aw, go ahead and put on a bass line." We were just about ready to go out and do a tour, and I brought Scott up to the studio one night after

rehearsal. It took about an hour and a half, the same way as with Arthur Barrow on "No Not Now" --I said, "Play this: Boop, boop, boop," and he did it. He was playing the bass through a Vox amp, and that's what gives it that particular sound.

Q:After returning from your European tour, how did you feel when you found out that "Valley Girl" had become a big hit?
FZ:There are a couple of things about "Valley Girl" being a hit: First, it's not my fault -they didn't buy that record because it had my name on it. They bought it because they liked Moon's voice. It's got nothing to do with the song or the performance. It has everything to do with the American public wanting to have some new syndrome to identify with. And they got it. There it is. That's what made it a hit. Hits are not necessarily musical phenomena. But as far as my feeling about it goes, I think that if that amuses Americans, well, hey! I'm an all-American boy, and I'm here to perform that function for you. Since that time, we've hired a guy to make merchandising deals on that song. And you wouldn't believe what kinds of things will be coming out with the words "Valley Girl" on them. You name it, everything from lunch boxes to cosmetics, including a talking Valley Girl doll in February.

Q:On "I Come From Nowhere" there's a strong dissonance, like a minor second clashing in the first few bars. Is that guitar?
FZ:That is a bunch of bass harmonics a half step apart. He's playing what I think is a little three-part harmonic chord.

Q:What kind of guitar and enhancements did you employ for the solo about two-thirds of the way through that song?
FZ:It was the Les Paul played through a Carvin amp. I think it's straight, no effects. That was just what it needed, I thought.

Q:Did you record the rhythm track live and then mix in the solo and overdub parts?
FZ:Oh, no. Here's how that song started off: The original track was a rhythm box, and then the vocals were added. Then some guitar parts were added -- not the solo, just the orchestrational parts. Then the guitar solo was added on top of the rhythm box track, and the drums were added to play along with the guitar solo. The bass track was added last.

Q:What guitar did you use on "Drowning Witch"?
FZ:I think both solos are with the Hendrix Strat.

Q:How did you get the feedback that pervades throughout?
FZ:It's live. Those were live tracks that were overdubbed. There are some equalizers in my guitar-- a parametric EQ with a little, narrow peak. And once you find the feedback range in the room, you can turn it up, and the guitar doesn't have to be loud to just feed back at that frequency.

Q:Do you usually twiddle with it during a solo?
FZ:Yeah. First I set it during the sound check, and then if the acoustics of the room change due to the audience, I can just reach over and tweeze it while I'm playing.

Q:How do you synchronize parts from different performances for final mixing into one song?
FZ:First of all, you start off with a band that is highly rehearsed, that maintains their tempo. They learn it at a certain tempo, then they'll play it the same way night after night. Do you know how many edits there are in "Drowning Witch"? Fifteen! That song is a basic track from 15 different cities. And some of the edits are like two bars long. And they're written

parts -- all that fast stuff. It was very difficult for all the guys to play that correctly. Every once in a while somebody would hit the jackpot, but it's a very hard song to play. So there was no one perfect performance from any city. What I did was go through a whole tour's worth of tape and listen to every version of it and grab every section that was reasonably correct, put together a basic track, and then added the rest of the orchestration to it in the studio.

Q:Besides switching up the rhythm, how did you deal with variations in pitch?
FZ:Do you hear any? There were no VSO [variable-speed oscillator, which controls the speed of the tape recorder] changes of the sections at all, because when we go out on the road, everything is tuned to a tune-up box every day. We have a standard: Everybody tunes to the vibes, because their tuning doesn't drift. We calibrate all our Peterson Strobe Tuners to them. That gives you consistency.

Q:Last year you were doing the Allman Brothers' "Whipping Post" [At Fillmore East, Capricorn]. Why?
FZ:It started about ten or twelve years ago when some guy in the audience at a concert in Helsinki, Finland, requested it.

Q:In English?
FZ:Yes. He just yelled out "Whipping Post" in broken English. I have it on tape. And I said, "Excuse me?" I could just barely make it out. We didn't know it, and I felt kind of bad that we couldn't just play it and blow the guy's socks off. So when [pianist/vocalist/saxophonist] Bobby Martin joined the band, and I found out that he knew how to sing that song, I said, "We are definitely going to be prepared for the next time somebody wants 'Whipping Post' -- in fact we're going to play it before somebody even asks for it." I've got probably 30 different versions of it on tape from concerts all around the world, and one of them is going to be the "Whipping Post" -- the apex "Whipping Post" of the century.

Q:Maybe they mistook you for Duane Allman.
FZ:Oh sure they did. People do all the time.

The Frank Zappa Interview Picture Disk – part I

This text is transcribed from an imported CD called "The Frank Zappa Interview Picture Disk". According to my closest estimation based on the interview's context, it must have been conducted sometime in the summer of 1984. It was recorded after FZ had performed a set of concerts at the Odeon Hammersmith in London and some of the content of this interview refers to that set of concerts.

The Interviewer is not credited on the disc, but just so you'll know, from his accent he appears to have been an Anonymous British Person.

And, in case anyone gives a fuck, please note that this text was transcribed by Robert Moore on Friday, Dec.10 at 4:33 AM EDT - just 6 short days since FZ died at the much-too-early age of 52. My universe is significantly diminished by his passing.

Interviewer:
How did you enjoy yesterday?

Frank Zappa:
Yesterday's show? I didn't like it.

Interviewer:
You didn't?

Frank Zappa:
No, because we were requested to, uh, keep it, uh... See, ordinarily when we do a show we change the words to the songs based on what happened that day. My favorite show of the bunch here was the second show on the first night, where we changed everything. And that's when I enjoy the show. If I can laugh when I'm onstage because something creative is happening in that regard, that's when I really enjoy the show.

Yet last night's show was competent and it was tight and it was done because we are making a CD - Live At The Odeon Hammersmith. So, people from the company said, well, "You know, you can't just go around and change all these lyrics, the people wanna hear the real lyrics," and so I said "Ok, play it straight." So we went out there and played it straight and also it was being videotaped for French television, and you can't be too far out when you're doing that because how are they gonna subtitle it?

Interviewer:
I thought that playing "In France" for them was a... treat.

Frank Zappa:
They wanted that. That's the reason they came to do it because "In France" is being released as a single on the continent.

Interviewer:
A Single? (incredulously)

Frank Zappa:
Uh-Huh

Interviewer:
Are you surprised actually by it? Because it's a direct insult to the French if uh, you..

Frank Zappa:
No, it's not. It was fair commentary on what Frenchness means to a person who is not French and has to be subjected to Frenchness. It is not a put-down of the French. It is the facts.

Now, I was able to ascertain from some interviews I did in France that the toilet that we're speaking of in the song is referred to in France as The Turkish Toilet. So, if it's a Turkish Toilet, then what's it doing in France? Cause that's all I know from French toilets is the thing with the bombsight and the two footprints where you pull the chain and if you're lucky it doesn't climb up to your ankles when the stuff comes up out of the hole.

But all the stuff in that song is true including The Mystery Blowjob that happened to one of the guys in the band. You know, it started with this Green Fudge coming out of his weeny, and he didn't realize that you could get this disease from sticking it in somebody's mouth. That was 'cause he was a chump. But it did happen in France so it belongs in the song.

Interviewer:
Yes. From "The Man From Utopia" there is quite a lot of laughter and humor which, you have said before, when you laugh at something spontaneous you enjoy the show. For instance, "The Radio Is Broken"...

Frank Zappa:
I love that song. Most people hate that song but I love it.

Interviewer:
That's my ten-year-old kiddie's favorite.

Frank Zappa:
Yeah?

Interviewer:
Yes, he loves the parts, uh..

Frank Zappa:
If he could only understand the lyrics though because it's talking about things from Science Fiction Movies that really exist and if he hasn't seen those things..... if he had, the idea of what the Bottchino is is Very Special Stuff you know. It's very, very ... inside.

Interviewer:
You've been making references to, uh.... What do you call them? Fiction movies..

Frank Zappa:
Science Fiction

Interviewer:
Science Fiction Movies for years, and, um

Frank Zappa:
I like them.

Interviewer:
Goes back a long time, really. What is it mostly that attracts you to them? Is it the Cheapness in them?

Frank Zappa:
Yes. Absolutely the cheapness. That anybody would think for a minute that something made out of a rubber is gonna scare you in a black and white movie is so stupid.

Interviewer:
Did you find it perhaps sad in a way that we don't, on this side of the continent, experience the same films that you do, so there's more rapport as such.

Frank Zappa:
Well, the other side of that is outside the United States, people seem to pay more attention to the instrumental side rather than the lyrical side, 'cause they don't know what to make of the lyrics; they don't understand anything about the lyrics. Even the words they think they understand are being used in ways that they don't understand so maybe it balances out. In the United States they're more oriented toward the words and less toward the music.

Interviewer:
So when you come here do you actually have to prepare a special show?

Frank Zappa:
Usually what I do is, in places where they don't speak English well or at all, we stick to songs that have already been released on an album because the albums have lyrics in them and so somebody has a chance to hear something familiar. You can't, for example, in France do a show that has a lot of new material in it, it's just totally senseless. Or Spain too. Or Italy. In Germany you can because the English comprehension is a little bit better there, but in France.... no.

Interviewer:
Is it a headache for you to choose from the repertoire of songs that you've got? It must be.

Frank Zappa:
Well, the repertoire that we choose from for this particular band is 65 songs that they can play without worrying. That's three shows worth of material and every show is different. Each night before the show I make up a list of what they're gonna play that night and that way we don't get bored. And each day during the sound check we rehearse new songs that we are going to put into the show.

Interviewer:
Does that happen with every band that you normally have?

Frank Zappa:
Every band.

Interviewer:
65 or approximately.

Frank Zappa:
Well, the band in 82 knew 85.

Interviewer:
Yes.

Frank Zappa:
But they had been together a little bit longer.

Interviewer:
Because I quite like the selection that you did yesterday. Obviously for nostalgic reasons doing things from the Roxy album and some of them even going way way back, and also the interest that you've always had in doo-wop.

Frank Zappa:
This band can do doo-wop. The other bands I've had couldn't really get to it but we have the voices to cover the doo-wop stuff pretty good.

Interviewer:
Four vocals on it, which is quite good I thought.

Frank Zappa:
Real doo-wop is with a quintet.

Interviewer:
The one thing which people ask me all the time, when they make reference to you is, like, they find it very difficult to put their finger and say "Where is Frank Zappa at these days?"

Frank Zappa:
Well, the question is Who Cares? Why should I be anywhere? The fact is that I'm still making music of all different kinds and why should I be anywhere you want me to be? It's like, I shouldn't live in a box.

Interviewer:
What they're perhaps referring to is mostly the material that you choose to use. For instance, the last album, the Utopia album was very uncommercial, not that your music IS commercial-

Frank Zappa:
That one was VERY uncommercial.

Interviewer:
Compared to this one. The new album is hinting more on the easier side of listening.

Frank Zappa:
That's right. But I do both things.

Interviewer:
How do you make the choice? Do you wake up one morning and say "I'm going to do that this week."?

Frank Zappa:
Yeah, that's right. It's the same way I make up the choice for what we're gonna play in the show that night. The choices are based on some scientific reasons like "What are the acoustics like in the hall?" "Can we get away with this kind of material here?" "Do they speak English here?" "Does anybody have a sore throat that day?" Little things like that. You can change the show to accommodate what your circumstances are. Same thing with an album. You decide how many songs you have recorded, which ones fit together - there are always songs that are left out of an album.

Interviewer:
'Cause your shows are very well rehearsed.

Frank Zappa:
Immaculately rehearsed.

Interviewer:
You've said that so many times and, hence the feedback that you get in the press from some ex-musicians about being strict.

Frank Zappa:
Let me say this right now: Any ex-musician is an ex-musician for one of two reasons. One, he's not good enough to be in the band anymore; or Two, he had a career opportunity that led him to resign his post, for which there are probably 30 people waiting for his job.

I have no problem getting people to volunteer to subject themselves to the discipline that's in the band, and if you knew anything about the band and the crew... There is a spirit of accomplishment that surrounds this touring unit that is really quite remarkable. Second only to being in the Marines because this band can go out there and do anything. And they know it. And they're thankful that they were rehearsed to the point where, even under the most adverse circumstances, they can go out and do a 2-hour show that'll kick yer ass. And the crew will have the thing up and down in record time and everybody gets along and they're happy to be doing it, and that's what the discipline is all about.

A guy who leaves the band and then complains about the discipline... he's maybe regretting the fact that he's not in the band anymore and so how else is he gonna get his name in the paper than to say that I'm a dictator? Well, fact of the matter is, I AM the dictator - I'm the guy who signs the checks. I'm also the guy who has to take the responsibility for everything that goes wrong and along with that I have the responsibility for making sure that the band delivers a good performance to an audience that's bought a ticket. So it's not really being a dictator, it's being the referee between the audience and the band.

If the audience buys a ticket I say "Ok band, you have to do this - and these people want it good so give it to them good." And if they don't do it well they either have to improve themselves or they go. The word in the band is "Will that be an aisle or a window?", which means that your ticket back to Los Angeles is right over here, and everybody knows that. I've sent two guys home already from this tour.

Interviewer:
I think that really what you're saying is very fair, obviously. 'Cause what you're requesting out of the musicians is, uh..

Frank Zappa:
That they do their job.

Interviewer:
Quite easy really. You buy some goods and you want the delivery of the goods.

Frank Zappa:
Right. But see, the people that find that baffling would be people who have like a Union Mentality. The Union Mentality means that too many people do too little work for too much money and then go on strike in order to get more days off. And there are a lot of people like this in the world who think that that's the way things ought to be.

My attitude is this: I pay money to have a service performed for me on behalf of an audience that pays money for a service performed for them and I'm there to make sure that if somebody buys a ticket to my show they're not going to be disappointed in it. They're going to see a band that knows what they're doing, that does it well and delivers entertainment for the money that's spent.

Same thing on a record. Whether you like the style of the music is irrelevant. The quality of what's put into the show is definitely there and that quality is the result of a huge cash investment that I have to put out before the tour even starts. It costs a quarter of a million dollars to make a band sound like that. That's talking about 2 months of rehearsal, six days a week, eight hours a day; everybody's on salary, crew is on salary. I have the cost of all those salaries plus the rental of the hall that we rehearse in, the equipment and all that stuff - I pay for it before I get a nickel from anybody buying a ticket. There's not too many groups that will take that kind of a risk and not too many groups that have one man in the group who takes that financial risk himself. And that's the way I do my business. So, if there's something wrong with that then lemme know. The results speak for themselves.

Interviewer:
One of my questions is: You hear the band play live and whether it was a good night or a bad night, there's no doubt about it there's tight playing - very tight, very good. Musicians leave your band or get fired and they go play somewhere else and they sound like they've never been in your band, ever.

Frank Zappa:
Uh-huh

Interviewer:
And you wouldn't say "Has this person actually been in Frank's band?" It's unbelievable.

Frank Zappa:
But you know, but they all like to say they've been in the band. Like that gives them a seal of approval. You'd be surprised how many people have, in the ads for their album "Formerly with Frank Zappa", or something like that, it's like they've been to school. But if you listen to what they do you'd know they didn't really go to school. Some people come into the band as a stepping stone for something else in their career and they don't usually last very long. I don't mind them having their own career, but if you're in my band you're playing my music for the audience that wants to hear my music - that's why they came here. They didn't come here to hear your next album being rehearsed. They came here to hear reproductions of songs that I wrote because that's what they want. And that's what the job is. So anybody who is not satisfied doing that is welcome to leave and usually

encouraged to leave. But the guys that are in the band right now have a dedication to putting on a good show. It's really a good bunch of guys.

Interviewer:
There must be a sort of looseness as well between... they don't see you as a teacher - this teacher-like figure.

Frank Zappa:
No. For example, Chad, [Wackerman] the drummer, has been in the band since 81 and he's grown immensely since he's been in the band. This is the first tour that he's done with electric drums and prior to that he was totally sold on acoustic drums and everything. But he made the change, I requested that he change over to electric drums and now he's totally into it, and you see from his solo last night that he's using it in a musical way; which is something that he probably wouldn't have done left to his own devices. When George Duke was in the band I wanted him to play a synthesizer - he didn't want to do it. He didn't think that was-

Interviewer:
He didn't want to sing either.

Frank Zappa:
And he didn't want to sing. That's right. But, I'm not saying "I told you so," but I think that it was good for George to be in there and have that kind of encouragement. The way the guys in the band view me, I believe, is not so much as their pal because we usually don't hang out together in our time off. Everybody is, if you have any time off I'm usually doing this and they're out doing whatever they do. But they know that I'm going to treat them fairly and if I write them a check, it doesn't bounce. What more can you want?

Interviewer:
You went through a few hard times there didn't you? A few years ago, I think on building your own home studio.

Frank Zappa:
Yeah. But it's all done and it's operational and all the new product has been done there.

Interviewer:
The Utility Muffin Research Kitchen?

Frank Zappa:
Right. It's now a completely digital studio.

Interviewer:
You've had that in mind since "Bongo Fury"?

Frank Zappa:
Well I've been wanting to have a studio since 1962.

Interviewer:
The first one was in Cucamonga.

Frank Zappa:
That's right.

Interviewer:
Goes a long way back. Last year you had a riot on your hands in Italy - or Sicily?

Frank Zappa:
Sicily.

Interviewer:
You went there for a visit of the old roots.

Frank Zappa:
That's right. I wanted to see the town that my father was born in and I went there and I saw it and then we played the concert and the next thing you know, you have the army and the police; each with their own general telling them what to do; an audience that had brought their own guns; and they're shooting tear gas and tearing up this stadium that we were playing in. We played for an hour and a half in this riot with tear gas in our face and everything else, and when it was all over we went off the stage and we were trapped inside this place. The audience was circling around outside shooting at the police and the police were shooting back.

Interviewer:
It wasn't a very nostalgic view of your roots, was it?

Frank Zappa:
Well, I got a pretty good idea of what my Sicilian roots are like after seeing the town of Partinico - it was pretty bleak.

Interviewer:
After that you were very.. pissed off really about coming back to Europe..

Frank Zappa:
Oh yes.

Interviewer:
And you swore that you wouldn't come back but-

Frank Zappa:
I changed my mind.

Interviewer:
How long do you want to keep doing this? You keep changing your mind but is there ever going to be a time when you're actually not going to change your mind?

Frank Zappa:
Probably. I don't know when. I try and accommodate my body, what my body feels like it wants to do. I think that's the only way you can live as a True Pagan. You know, if it feels right, then that's what you do and it felt right to go on the road so here I am. And if it gets to the point where it doesn't feel right then I'm not gonna do it.

Interviewer:
Has there been any times where your guitar solos during the concert on one specific song been actually transferred onto another song?

Frank Zappa:
What do you mean?

Interviewer:
Like you're playing this particular tune live, and you nearly always record your live shows.

Frank Zappa:
Right.

Interviewer:
And that particular solo found its place in a totally different song.

Frank Zappa:
Absolutely. The whole "Joe's Garage" album is that way. All the guitar solos on "Joe's Garage" came from the European tour in 1980. They were recorded on a 2-track Nagra, just 2 microphones in front of my guitar amplifier and every time I played a solo the guy turned it on and recorded just the guitar. And when we did the "Joe's Garage" album I found the solos I liked and put them on top of the studio tracks and that's what's in there.

Interviewer:
What you were playing yesterday, and I think you've done it many times before, but yesterday was very very obvious, you're playing very much what I could describe as Contrary Notes; not going according to the melody - guitar notes that you were playing, uh, is like a totally different song altogether. Do you ever shut the rest of the rhythm section from your ears and actually concentrate on actually-

Frank Zappa:
Well I always concentrate on what I'm playing but I can hear the rhythm section and I have the type of discipline where I can either play their rhythm... Actually, what was happening last night on some of the solos I was using a digital delay that had a single chord stored in it, and it was on a loop, and every time that loop would come around it would have a certain rhythm which was totally irrelevant to what the rhythm of the bass and drums were doing. So I have a choice of two different established rhythms that I could play, plus the option of choosing a third one that was completely between those.

There's no reason why the human mind shouldn't be able to compute that kind of math when they hear it and it leads you into some interesting harmonic and melodic directions.

For example, a melody functions in a harmonic climate. The chord that is being played is the harmonic climate - if it's an augmented chord it's a mysterious climate; if it's a diminished chord it's a little tenser; if it's minor it's serious; if it's major it's happy; if it's major seventh you're falling in love; if it's augmented 11th it's bebop. You know these are all established harmonic aromas that people recognize whether they do it consciously or not, that's what's built into you. So a melody functions against a harmonic climate in terms of what is the fractional delay between the time that you hit a note that is tension to that chord, to the the time that you hit a note which is inside the chord which creates the resolution - that's how melodies work. How many notes are you playing in your line that rub against the chord versus how many notes are inside the chord that takes the tension to rest. Your ear is computing that, ok?

Now, if you're playing a straight disco number where everybody is marching along to the same beat, well, your options for the amount of intrigue you can create with a melody

improvised against a chord are pretty limited. Because the minute you stray from an exact 16th note fluctuation, the disco consumer loses interest because he wants everything to sound like it came out of a Casio rhythm machine. But with the type of stuff that I do, once the solo begins, unless it's a fixed 12-bar thing like I did two choruses on "Penguin In Bondage" in the key of D - that's that. But if it's an open-ended solo that starts with a single tonality, I can do amazing things in that context if you understand what is happening musically - what's going on.

Some people listen to it and say "That's awfully weird," or "That scale is strange," or "Those notes are weird," but there's a reason for doing it and there's a lot of skill involved in choosing those notes and there's also a lot of skill involved in the rhythm section being able to accompany me in what I'm doing. That bass player [Scott Thunes] is great at following me. He's one of my favorite bass players to work with because his harmonic concept, um - he understands what I'm doing when I do those things.

And one of the techniques I was using last night was: the chord that was stored in the loop has no third in it. That means that the pitch of the chord which determines whether it's major, minor, augmented or diminished, is missing. All you have is the root, the second and the fifth. When you have those three intervals in there you still hear it as a chord, but the notes that you can play against it enable you to encompass all the different variations of the nature of the chord. You can play Major Thirds, Minor Thirds, and everything in between against that chord. It's more like a neutral piece of canvas that you can paint on, and consequently, the bass notes that support that chord... a lot of different bass notes can be used and each one that goes against the chord creates another set of mathematical possibilities for the melody notes that are happening on top of it. And, when you combine that with the mathematical possibilities of what the harmonic rhythm of the melody notes will be, how many rub - how many relax and all of that stuff - that's a world of opportunities during each song and I love doing that during the show. That's my favorite thing to do in the show.

Interviewer:
There's always like a key that you've got that you like a lot, I think, is it the key of D?

Frank Zappa:
No.

Interviewer:
On "Zoot Allures?"

Frank Zappa:
No, "Zoot Allures" was played in kind of an A7th tonality.

Interviewer:
The napkins.. uh

Frank Zappa:
"Black Napkins" is not, uh, that's actually two chords. That goes between C#minor and D Major 7th. But there's a lot of different keys you can play in there. I play in F# Major on top of that.

Interviewer:
I'm not going to ask technical questions because, uh-

Frank Zappa:
You don't know.

Interviewer:
Because I don't know, BUT - what I wanted to ask was how often do you hit Bum Notes?

Frank Zappa:
Lots. Because especially if you're playing really fast - and all you have to do - at the rate I'm going on some of those runs - if one fret is sticky you're gonna miss.

Interviewer:
I thought that was evident at the beginning yesterday.

Frank Zappa:
That was what?

Interviewer:
Evident at the beginning of the, uh, show... did you do two shows last night or one?

Frank Zappa:
One.

Interviewer:
Like you weren't happy with the way your guitar playing was going or were you happy.

Frank Zappa:
Uh, it was okay - I mean I think that I played better solos the night before in the second show and there was a couple of solos that I played last night that I thought were really good but, uh, I'm the kind of guy who would prefer to go out there and take his chances rather than learn a solo that goes in the song and play it exactly the same way every night. I mean, what kind of a life is that, y'know? I'd rather have the ups and downs than the assuredness that I was going to go out there and amaze everybody with technique - I wanna hear some music. And the challenge for me is writing an instant composition while I'm playing and that's what I do.

Interviewer:
Do you personally think that you're under-rated as a guitarist?

Frank Zappa:
I think that I shouldn't be rated as a guitarist. I think that rating guitarists is the kind of a thing that, uh, that's a stupid hobby is rating guitar players.

Q; You're a composer.

Frank Zappa:
I'm a composer and my instrument is the guitar. If you like the composition, fine - I mean, my technique as a guitar player is ... fair. There are plenty of people who play faster than I do, never hit a wrong note, and have a lovely sound, okay? If you want to rate guitar players - go for them. But there isn't anybody else who will take the chances that I will take with a composition, live onstage in front of an audience - and just go out there and have the nerve, the ultimate audacity to say "Okay, I don't know what I'm gonna play, and you don't know what I'm gonna play, and that makes us equal so let's go, we'll have an

adventure here." And, that's what I do. There's no way to rate that. You either like that kind of stuff or you don't.

Interviewer:
You traveled quite lightly this time it seems. You used only the Strat yesterday.

Frank Zappa:
Right.

Interviewer:
Is there a specific reason for that?

Frank Zappa:
I like that guitar. I have another Strat in the back in case that one goes off, but that particular neck ... the whole guitar is customized. The only thing that is stock on there was the original Strat body which has been stripped and repainted in that old Telecaster color. But the neck is custom, all the electronics are custom, all the pickups are custom and I like the way it sounds.

Interviewer:
What you were talking about limitations before as people want to compare you as a good guitarist, bad guitarist against other guitarists like some sort of match. Are you disappointed that there are so many schmucks probably about who go on and just perform just for the sake of the guitar, and ignoring all of the other concepts of the music?

Frank Zappa:
There's always somebody who wants to consume that and they're entitled to consume it and they're entitled to love it and they're entitled to worship as a way of life and so on and so forth. That's for them. What I'm dealing with is something entirely different and I must say, in all fairness, without being rated I know that there are people out there who love what I do on the guitar.

Interviewer:
One final question, Frank: As always, there's quite a lot of product in the can, as they say. You always have. So, what's up now?

Frank Zappa:
You know that there's four albums that are coming out right now.

Interviewer:
Yes.

Frank Zappa:
You got the Boulez album, which is out. You got "Them Or Us", which is just about to come out, which is going to be followed very closely by "Thing-Fish" which is three-record box with a book in it, and you got Francesco which comes out right after that. Also, the concerts here at the Odeon Hammersmith were recorded for a CD which was going to be just a CD, now a vinyl album, and that'll be coming out sometime next year.

Interviewer:
Are you going to have a breather between each product?

Frank Zappa:
No. These first four are going to come out very close together because they won't conflict with each other - they're totally different things. They're in a way all for the same audience, but maybe there are some people who might like the Boulez album who wouldn't like "Thing-Fish" and vice-versa. So, you have your options. And for the person who is a hardcore fan, there's lots of stuff coming out this season.

Interviewer:
Very good.

Frank Zappa:
Okay?

Interviewer:
Thanks a lot.

Frank Zappa:
You're welcome.

The Frank Zappa Interview Picture Disk – part II

This is the second of 2 Frank Zappa interviews which were transcribed from an imported CD called "The Frank Zappa Interview Picture Disk". According to my closest estimation based on the interview's context, it must have been conducted sometime in early to mid 1984.

As with the first transcription, The Interviewer is not credited on the disc and so he remains anonymous. I believe, due to the context and the accent of the interviewer, that this was possibly conducted somewhere in Germany. While in the first interview it was obvious that the interviewer was a fan, in this one it seems equally clear that this interviewer knows very little of Frank and his work. He keeps referring to an incorrect bio for information on asking some of his questions.

This Interview was fairly hard to transcribe in places because of the poor quality of the original recording. I have tried to present it as accurately as possible.

By the way, in case anyone is wondering, the imported CD that this material comes from contains positively NO copyright information of any sort. Also, and in case anyone gives a fuck, please note that this text was transcribed by Robert Moore on Saturday, Dec.11 at 1:40 AM EDT - a mere week since FZ died at the much-too-early age of 52. My universe remains significantly diminished by his passing.

Interviewer:
The Bio says that you've got a book as well.. "Them or Us" - I haven't seen it. Can you tell me something about it?

Frank Zappa:
It's due off the press in 2 weeks in the United States, and it's Three hundred and sixty-something pages and I'm publishing it myself.

Interviewer:
Oh.

Frank Zappa:
The first printing is 5000 copies.

Interviewer:
Can you tell me something about... what is it about? I mean, you cannot judge by the album obviously. The story has to be more... cohesive if I may say.

Frank Zappa:
The book is written... It's a book for people who hate to read, and it's written in the style of a screenplay so that each situation is described in terms of what a camera would see, what the physical action is, what the people say and what they do. And so it takes you very

quickly through some complicated situations where, if you had written it as a normal book it would be..like that [probably makes finger-width gesture].

Interviewer:
Uh-huh

Frank Zappa:
And it's a fiction book and it's very funny.

Interviewer:
Has it got anything to do with the album? I mean, can the album be used as a soundtrack to it?

Frank Zappa:
Well, the way it works is: the book... you know what the Unified Field Theory is?

Interviewer:
I'm afraid not.

Frank Zappa:
Well... in physics they have this thing that they've been looking for - it's the Unified Field Theory that explains the interrelationship between how gravity works and atomic energy and all this stuff - they're looking for one equation that explains it all and makes it work because right now there's contradictions. And.. let's just say that the book is like a Unified Field Theory that will hold together "Billy The Mountain", "Greggery Peccary", "Joe's Garage" "Them Or Us", "Thing-Fish".... all these different stories, it shows you how they work together to make one long, really complicated story. And the "Them Or Us" album is only one part of this major release that is coming out this year.

There are three other albums that are released at approximately the same time. The Boulez album, the Francesco album, and the "Thing-Fish" album - and the book relates... The Boulez album is not related to it but all the rest of the stuff is related. And so if you read the book and listen to those three, plus knowing from the past "Joe's Garage", "Billy The Mountain", "Greggery Peccary" then it would make an awful lot of sense to you. But other than that it's very hard to describe.

Interviewer:
The way you describe it, it comes as a summation or culmination of what you've been working for the past twenty years, let's say?

Frank Zappa:
Well, no it doesn't really work like that. People, especially in Europe, when they want to know more about what the lyrics mean, if they can read English the book would help them.

Interviewer:
Uh-huh.

Frank Zappa:
And if they can't it'll.... confuse them very much.

Interviewer:
Any possibility for the book being issued in this country?

Frank Zappa:
Since I'm paying to have it printed myself, I'll have to just see whether or not I can sell enough of them in the United States. I haven't even spoken to any publishers in [unintelligible]. I took it to publishers in the United States and they were afraid of it, so I said "Forget it. I'll just print it myself" and sell it mail-order.

Interviewer:
But it's obvious that what's published nowadays.... that anything serious... you know... doesn't really .... there's plenty of dross being printed nowadays as far as I can gather.

Frank Zappa:
When we talked to a US publisher, they were more concerned that it LOOK like a book, and this doesn't look like a book - it looks like a screenplay. And so they have taken a position that people won't read it because it doesn't say, "The leaves fell off the tree", and "It's five o'clock" and it's all in paragraphs. I personally don't like to read, and I've said in other interviews that, for me, reading is about as much fun as standing in line at the passport window in the French airport.

Interviewer:
[laughs] - That's very exciting.

Frank Zappa:
Yeah. That exciting. So, it's designed basically for people who would enjoy the albums rather than for a literary audience.

Interviewer:
The book, which is in a book form obviously is written like a screenplay, and the music that you've been making for the past twenty years... you've obviously had a certain disregard for what is considered a proper album, you know what I mean - one style, each song nicely defined. I mean, let's take "Them Or Us". It's, uh, there are different pieces which, by today's industry standard, is very odd.

Frank Zappa:
Uh-huh. So?

Interviewer:
So. My question is: How have you managed to survive all these years in such a bitchy industry?

Frank Zappa:
It's not even a matter of surviving in it because I refuse to be stopped. You know, just because somebody... There's a big audience that wants albums that have all the same songs on 'em, and there's a number of other artists who do that so they're never going to run out of material - they'll always have what they like, but the people who like what I do like variety. They enjoy that experience of having the contrasts between a song in one style with one kind of a sound followed by something completely different. To them that's a refreshing experience.

That's the way I like to hear music, I like things next to each other that at first seem incongruous, but then when you step back into the whole thing you see it fits together properly.

Interviewer:
So in this contest of the free discussion, what does a success mean to you?

Frank Zappa:
Success to me is if I have a musical or let's say any kind of an artistic concept and I start out to execute it, if it is executed to 100% of the specifications of what I imagined when the idea first came up - that's success. That's the only thing that really matters to me because if I don't enjoy listening to it myself when it's all done, then why did I bother to do it? because there are other things I can do to make more money than this. This is a high overhead business. I happen to like what I'm doing so, to me success is if you get close to 100%

Interviewer:
Another thing the bio states is that your interest lies more within the serious music.

Frank Zappa:
No. Let me explain to you about serious music. What most people regard as serious music is not really that serious at all. See, there's been a lot of propaganda about classical music since it was first invented. Let's examine the history of classical music briefly, and then you'll see what I'm talking about.

All the music that people regard as great masterpieces today were written for the amusement of kings, churches or dictators - that's who was paying the rent. If the man who wrote the music happened to be working in a style that was appealing to the person who was paying for it at the time, he had a hit, he had a job, and he stayed alive. If he didn't, he could lose his fingers, he could lose his head, he could be exiled or he'd starve to death. There was very little in between.

All you have to do is look at a book called "Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians" and you can see that throughout the ages there have been guys who had hits and guys who didn't have hits, and it's not necessarily connected to the quality of what they wrote, it's connected to how well they pleased the patron that was paying the freight - and it's the same thing today.

So, all the norms, the acceptable norms of classical music, are really the taste norms of the church, the king, or the dictator that has been been paying for it down through the ages. It was not the taste of the people. People never got to decide. So, when you say I have more of an interest in serious music, I take my work seriously but I perceive it as entertainment and it's entertainment for those people who like that sort of entertainment. I don't write for a king, I don't write for a church, and I don't write for a government - I write for my friends and that's the way the material should be perceived - it's entertainment for them. Even if it's written for an orchestra or it's written for a rock and roll band, it makes no difference, it's the same people who would listen to the music. I have several orchestral albums, okay? Those are not purchased by people who go out and buy the Dvorak New World Symphony, they're bought by rock and roll consumers. A special type of rock and roll consumer.

Interviewer:
So in other words, the bio is wrong because whatever music you make is serious in approach regardless to being regarded as rock and roll or put in a shops rack - rock and roll and the other one is serious music.

Frank Zappa:
Correct.

Interviewer:
Hmm, I see. Well, um, future - you recently had two plays.

Frank Zappa:
No, I've written them but they haven't been produced yet.

Interviewer:
I see.....no, um, you see the bio is not right so.... (laughs)

Frank Zappa:
Not correct.

Interviewer:
That's the only thing I had to, uh..... Well, I see that you are extending into all these areas. I mean, movies being an old love of yours since you were 16 or something? Is there a way to stop you?

Frank Zappa:
I don't understand the [unintelligible] of these because you can't... It's hard to expand into movies because it costs so much more money to make a movie than it does to make a record and I'm self- financed.

Interviewer:
But you were one of the first to have an independent label.

Frank Zappa:
That's true.

Interviewer:
When did you realize that you can be self-employed in the industry that does not, until that time did not allow self-employment?

Frank Zappa:
I realized it at the point where... that first independent label deal was as a result of a lawsuit that was brought against MGM. They were happy to give me an independent deal because we had caught them doing something with the books that was not.... right. So they figured you know, this stuff will never sell, he'll be out of business in 15 minutes - let him do it. But my arrangement is unique, not only in the fact that I'm self-employed, but that I own my all my masters. I own the rights to everything that I do. Most people who make records do not. And I fought for that and I think that it was worth fighting for.

Interviewer:
Can you remember what was the first, and when did you get your first guitar?

Frank Zappa:
First guitar I played on was my father's guitar.

Interviewer:
So what was actually the first guitar that you owned? Was it after that movie - "Run Home Slow"?

Frank Zappa:
No, the first one that, well actually that I *owned*, yes, because prior to that time I rented the guitar. I rented a Telecaster from a music store in Ontario, California - but the first one I was able to buy was the one on "Run Home Slow". It was a PS5 Gibson SwitchMaster.

Interviewer:
What is the one that you use now?

Frank Zappa:
It's a customized Stratocaster. The only thing on this guitar that is Fender is the body. Everything else on it is custom. It has a custom neck, it has customized electronics, custom pickups, Floyd Rose tremolo.

Interviewer:
Do you use it in the studio as well as on the stage?

Frank Zappa:
I just starting using this particular guitar in July, and usually when I go on tour I take a number of guitars and I change them during the show. The ones I brought on the 82 tour I changed a lot. On this tour I just play this one guitar.

Interviewer:
And the other part of the same article is going to be your thoughts on some of your contemporaries and your people, if you don't mind. People like Chuck Berry?

Frank Zappa:
Chuck Berry? Well, I used to like Chuck Berry when I was in High School. Songs like "Havana Mill" and "Wee Wee Hours" which were the flip sides of the hits that he had - the more bluesy things. His main innovation besides that duck walk choreography was the multiple string guitar solos - the lines were harmonizing because he was playing on two strings at once. There was another guitar player who used to do that named Jimmy Nolan who I had a lot of respect for.

Interviewer:
B.B King?

Frank Zappa:
I don't like B.B. I saw him on television before I went on this tour and he was still blue.

Interviewer:
Oh yeah, I've seen him recently and I thought he was amazing. Keith Richard?

Frank Zappa:
I don't know anything about Keith Richard.

Interviewer:
Jimi Hendrix?

Frank Zappa:
I knew Jimi and I think that the best thing you could say about Jimi was: there was a person who shouldn't use drugs.

Interviewer:
John McLaughlin?

Frank Zappa:
I met John. I think he's a great guitar player and I think that he's probably done a lot to educate American audiences to some aspects of Eastern music that they wouldn't have come into contact with before. We did a tour with McLaughlin and old Mahavishnu, we did 11 concerts with them.

Interviewer:
Lowell George?

Frank Zappa:
There's another guy who shouldn't use drugs.

Interviewer:
Eric Clapton?

Frank Zappa:
I know Eric, I haven't seen him in years and years. There's another guy who shouldn't use drugs.

Interviewer:
Jeff Beck?

Frank Zappa:
One of my favorite guitar players on the planet. From a melodic standpoint and just in terms of the conception of what he plays, he's fabulous. I like Jeff.

Interviewer:
Rory Gallagher?

Frank Zappa:
We worked 2 jobs with Rory Gallagher on this tour and, uh,.....[long pause]... he's still playing the blues.

Interviewer:
Jimmy Page?

Frank Zappa:
I don't know anything about Jimmy Page.

Interviewer:
Peter Green?

Frank Zappa:
I don't know him either.

Interviewer:
Jerry Garcia?

Frank Zappa:
We did one concert with Garcia on this tour but we were the opening act and I didn't see any of his set.

Interviewer:
Pete Townshend?

Frank Zappa:
I've met Pete but I don't know what I can say about his guitar playing.

Interviewer:
Robert Fripp?

Frank Zappa:
I've never heard a Robert Fripp record.

Interviewer:
Ritchie Blackmore?

Frank Zappa:
I have met Ritchie too, and..... I'm not really familiar with the work of these people because you have to understand I'm not a pop consumer and I don't listen to a lot of these.

Interviewer:
[What do you listen to?]

Frank Zappa:
Well, what I do is I take cassettes with me on the road because sometimes you're sitting in the hotel room and you just want to listen to something, but what I take is not rock and roll. I like Chopin, I have Purcell, I have Webern, I have Varese, I have Bulgarian music. I don't listen to Rock and roll.

Interviewer:
Yes, um, Carlos Santana?

Frank Zappa:
We worked with Carlos Santana on Cologne in 1980 or 81 and it was a similar situation. We did two shows at the sport palace in Cologne. They opened the first show, we closed it. Then we opened the second show and they closed it so I never heard him play.

Interviewer:
As you said you don't listen to popular music so I don't expect you know Eddie Van Halen.

Frank Zappa:
I do know Eddie. He comes over to the house because he hangs out with my son.

Interviewer:
I see. But do you know him as a guitar player?

Frank Zappa:
Oh yeah. He and my son play together and he's fabulous, but there's another guy who shouldn't use drugs.

Interviewer:
I presume you don't know The Edge - from U2?

Frank Zappa:
The Edge?

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Frank Zappa:
No.

Interviewer:
[unintelligible] from Big Country?

Frank Zappa:
No.

Interviewer:
What would be your thoughts on the original guitar playing of the Mothers, i.e. yourself?

Frank Zappa:
Well, there's one other guy whose work I know who should be included in that list who I respect and that's Allan Holdsworth.

Interviewer:
I was going to ask you who was your favorite guitar player.

Frank Zappa:
Well, my original favorite guitar player was Johnny "Guitar" Watson, not from a technical standpoint but from listening to what his notes meant in the context in which they were played; and also Guitar Slim who was the first guitar player that I ever heard that had distortion - even during the 50s. In a strange way I think I probably derive more of my style from his approach to the guitar from the solos that I heard then.

Interviewer:
You still haven't told me your thoughts on yourself as a guitar player.

Frank Zappa:
Well, I do something very different on the guitar. I don't so much play the guitar as make up stuff... the notes that I play during the solo, I conceive it as a composition that's happening instantly at the time that it's... You know, you have 2 minutes to fill up or you have 9 minutes to fill up or whatever it is - a piece of time which is anywhere from 2 to 9 minutes long and you're gonna decorate it with notes - you're gonna make a composition in there.

The quality of that composition is determined by what you're physically capable of playing at that time, what the rhythm section will allow you to play and whether or not the keyboard

player who's supplying the harmonic climate is going to mess up what you're playing by sticking in his favorite Jazz Chord right there. These are all the dangers a person faces when improvising a guitar solo.

There are some guitar players who will practice their guitar solos and they will always be perfect and they will be the same every night - I don't do that. When it's time to play, I don't know what I'm going to play until I start doing it; and then an idea will pop up and I'll just develop it in the same way I'd develop an idea on a piece paper except that I don't have to wait to hear it - I get to hear it as it's coming out.

Interviewer:
And the last question on this section is: What would be the future of guitar - or rather, how do you see the future of guitar in the increasingly synth and keyboard orientation to music?

Frank Zappa:
There will always be a market for people who want to hear guitars squealing and oinking and bending and twanging and making sounds like guitars are supposed to make. There is a market of people who are interested in fashion and they will begin hating all those other old guitar sounds in favor of guitar sounds which are not like guitar sounds but are played in guitar position but sound like synthesizers - there's a market for that, there are people who want to hear it - but I don't think that will be the ultimate future of the guitar.

Interviewer:
I would like to ask you 2 questions: one is... on "Sometime In New York City", the John Lennon and Yoko Ono?

Frank Zappa:
What about it?

Interviewer:
What was it? How did it come about and all that?

Frank Zappa:
The day before the show, a journalist in New York City woke me up - knocked on the door and is standing there with a tape recorder and goes: "Frank, I'd like to introduce you to John Lennon," you know, waiting for me to gasp and fall on the floor and I said "Well, ok. Come on in." And we sat around and talked, and I think the first thing he said to me was "You're not as ugly as I thought you would be." So anyway, I thought he had a pretty good sense of humor so I invited him to come down and jam with us at the Fillmore East.

We had already booked in a recording truck because we were making the "Live at the Fillmore" album at the time. After they had sat in with us, an arrangement was made that we would both have access to the tapes. He wanted to release it with his mix and I had the right to release it with my mix - so that's how that one section came about.

The bad part is, there's a song that I wrote called "King Kong" which we played that night, and I don't know whether it was Yoko's idea or John's idea but they changed the name of the song to "Jam Rag", gave themselves writing and publishing credit on it, stuck it on an album and never paid me. It was obviously not a jam session song - its got a melody, its got a bass line, it's obviously an organized song - little bit disappointing. I've never released my version of the mixes of that night.

Interviewer:
Do you ever intend to?

Frank Zappa:
One day yeah - but it would be drastically different because there were things that were edited out of their version and certain words that were being sung that were removed because of the editorial slant that they wanted to apply to the material and I have a slightly different viewpoint on it.

Interviewer:
And the last question is: You've been promising a 10-volume set of The Soots.

Frank Zappa:
Never of The Soots, no. The Soots don't have 10 volumes worth of material but what will come out is, now that I own all the masters for my stuff - the first box that has the first seven... all the early Mothers stuff plus the Mystery Disc which has some Soots material on it. That is now ready for release in the United States. The 10-record set that you referred to was live recordings of the early Mothers Of Invention. I can release that but I'm not going to until after I've re-released the whole catalog of the basic albums that I just got back from this lawsuit and that's coming out. Seven records per year with one box about every five years.

Interviewer:
I'd like to listen to them. Thank you very much.

Frank Zappa:
Okay.

Frank Zappa: The SongTalk Interview (1987)

By Paul Zollo

SongTalk, 1994 Vol 4 Issue 1
Songwriters On Songwriting

When Frank Zappa was thirteen years old and living in San Diego, he read an article in Look magazine praising the record merchandiser Sam Goody. It claimed that Goody was such a genius that he could sell any album no matter how ugly it was musically. And the album they chose as an example of this ultimate ugliness was The Complete Works of Edward Varèse, Volume I, which featured a percussion piece called "Ionizations." The writer described the piece as "a banging and clanging with sirens and stuff." When young Frank read this he said to himself', "Yeah! That's what I want!" He made the trek to what was then referred to as the local "Hi-Fi shop," where records were played on the new equipment to demonstrate the magic of Hi-Fi.

"Apparently, the guy had gotten this thing because the percussion was supposed to be spectacular," Zappa remembered, smiling warmly beneath his huge mustache. "But whenever he played it he didn't make any sales so the album was listed at $10.95, an exorbitant price for a 13-year-old. I walked into the store and saw this album with a black and white cover and a guy on the front who looked like a mad scientist. And I knew from the minute I saw it that it had to be the one. So I asked the guy how much it was and he told me and I didn't have the money, so I negotiated with him. And he was so happy that anybody would buy it to get it out of there, that he sold it to me for six dollars just to get it off his hands. I took it home and listened to it day and night for years."

From that day on, Frank Zappa's life was injected with music both wild and weird, music few of his childhood friends had ever heard of, let alone chose to play in their own homes. As he grew up, Zappa continued in the tradition of his idol, Varèse, in creating sounds and melodies and rhythms and textures entirely his own, music the world had never heard before.

Zappa died on December 4, 1993 in Los Angeles. He was 52 years old. Though his life ended at such a tragically young age, he left behind a body of work much greater than most men ever achieve in a single lifetime. Besides the universe of songs he wrote, Zappa wrote chamber music, orchestral suites, ballets, jazz compositions, concertos, symphonies and more, experimenting with and pushing the boundaries of pretty much every musical form there is. In his songwriting alone there is such a vast range of expression that it shares a quality with Scott Fitzgerald's famous quote about Hollywood, that it's impossible for one person to hold all of its equations in his head at once. Zappa's lyrics were often so barbed and ironic, or so deceptively simple and direct, that people sometimes neglected the compositional complexity and beauty of the music that accompanied them. Even his hit "Dancing Fool" shifted into measures of 10/ 16 time, a pretty weird time signature for AM or FM.

Zappa's soul was perhaps most completely expressed in his instrumental music, in which he was able to explore every rhythmic, tonal, harmonic, sonic and melodic relationship available to human ears. His album Sleep Dirt, for example, is an entirely instrumental work that features music both breathtakingly beautiful and mind-boggling. As he learned at an early age from Varèse, there are no real rules restricting music. It can be anything and everything that a composer can imagine. And the imagination of Frank Zappa was limitless.

When we first interviewed him a few years ago, the Synclavier was giving him a liberty that Varèse never shared, to not only compose and experiment with new musical sounds and shapes, but to be able to hear the fruit of these labors instantly. He had just completed the wondrously instrumental Jazz From Hell when we met, and was in the midst of extending those discoveries into further realms of compositional exploration which he was happy to generously share with us in the warm inner sanctum of his home studio.

We conducted the following interview with Zappa for SongTalk in 1987, at a time when he was publicly fighting Tipper Gore's PMRC and their attempts to place warning labels on albums. Because of this political activity, Zappa was seen to be a little too controversial to be featured on the cover of this journal published by a non-profit organization, and was relegated instead only to our inner pages. It's a belated honor for us at this moment in history to pay tribute to the astonishing musical legacy of Frank Zappa by finally featuring him on our cover.

What follows is our original interview with Zappa, first printed in SongTalk in 1987, Volume 2, Issue 5. It happened to be one of the very first interviews I conducted for SongTalk soon after I became editor. It led me to believe that all interviews could be set up as easily, and that all interview subjects would be as gracious, humorous and brilliant. Of course, I was wrong. There is nobody else like Zappa.

Frank Zappa means different things to different people. To some, he is the outspoken, political activist who went to Washington to speak out against the PMRC and all forms of censorship. To others, he is the long-haired Zappa of the sixties, fronting the Mothers of Invention, who, in 1966 released both the first double album and the first concept album in rock history (Freak Out). To others, he's a true guitar hero: filling up full hockey stadiums with the sound of his extended guitar solos. To still others, he is the very cynical, bizarrely humorous creator of satirical gems such as "Dancing Fool" and "Valley Girl." To many, especially those outside the realm of American influence, he is a compositional genius, writing his own distinctive brand of harmonically complex, rhythmically jangled music for everything from a rock band to the London Symphony Orchestra. However you view him, he is undoubtedly one of the most innovative and creative forces in music, continuing to break new ground now as he has done for twenty years.

Zappa's new ground is being broken on the Synclavier, an amazing machine that can produce both sampled and synthesized sounds and which can be controlled completely by a computer. With one, a composer has the equivalent of a symphony orchestra always at his beck and call, ready to play any piece of music the instant that it is conceived. The difference being that the Synclavier can perform music humans would be physically unable to play, and it can produce sounds and combinations of sounds previously unheard by human ears.

At home, Zappa's demeanor is closer to an Einstein than a Hendrix. Prior to this interview, he caught a quick four hour nap after leaving instructions with his engineer to make mixes

of pieces he had been working on in his home studio. When we arrived, he was summoned from his bed – many days of gray growth on his face, hair all over the place – looking very weary. The guy literally works around the clock.

After the interview was completed, we had the privilege of being ushered into Zappa's home studio and hearing Synclavier pieces in progress. Though he didn't smile much, his pleasure at being the first person ever to create this particular music was obvious, and wonderful to share. (For example, he would say, "Let's see what 22 notes in the space of one eighth note might sound like on a bassoon.") He put out a cigarette in the standing ashtray beside his chair, lit another, leaned back and pushed the start button on the Synclavier. The music that filled the studio with all the force of a concert hall, was, like all the music that he has created in his life, colorful, compelling and uniquely and unquestionably Zappa.

SongTalk: Do you generally approach a composition from a rhythmic viewpoint rather than a melodic one?

Frank Zappa: It depends on what kind of song it is. If it's a song where the text is important, the first job is to make sure that the setting is doing something for the lyric.

Sometimes it's like a difference tone. That's where you have a note and a note and the combination of these two notes gives you a third note, which is a difference tone. You get a theoretical difference tone from lyrics which are set ironically. The sum total of the package is more than just these words, this chord. You get the third concept, which is that these two things don't belong together but somebody put them there. And so you get the extra message there.

The other thing that you have to keep in mind, when writing a song, is who is going to perform it. When I write for myself, since I can't really sing at all (I have a very difficult time holding a pitch, can't hold long notes, can't do any ornamentation), the melody lines tend to be simpler in terms of how wide the leaps are, how long the notes have to be, and the orchestrational texture tends to be more complicated to compensate for the lack of interest that is in the vocal line.

When you're thinking of melodies, do you work on a keyboard or do you come up with melodies in your head?

I can do it any way. I can think of them in my head, I can do it on a keyboard, I can do it on a guitar, I do it on a marimba.

And there's no one way that makes you feel the most comfortable?

It depends on what the end result is going to be. A song like "Strictly Genteel," for example, which has not only a fairly dense orchestral texture, but it's got complicated words, there's no way that I could have done that without the help of a piano, because the piano part is so integral to the thing. I don't play piano – can plunk things out slowly and write down exactly what the thing is supposed to be.

Oftentimes, though, unless you have really skilled musicians in the band, you can't have the piece rendered properly because it takes a certain amount of skill to be able to do those things, and people with that kind of skill generally don't gravitate towards rock and roll. But I've been really lucky in having people available for auditions that want to go into

the band and play hard music and actually turn out to be roadable people that can do it. And so I write for them.

When you are working on a composition, do you write everything down? For example, the pieces on Jazz from Hell?

Everything on that album was typed on the Synclavier except for "St. Ettiene" which was a live guitar solo.

By "typed on the Synclavier" do you mean that you play it on a keyboard or that you are typing it?

You can do it either way – on the keyboard or by typing note names on sheet music. You look at a stave and say, "I want a G, G3, one eight note long, right there," and you type it in and presto, there's a G there.

And then it plays it for you?

Yeah, as any instrument that you'd like to have it be.

And do you enjoy this method of composing?

Well, since they have software updates every year, and since there's new hardware available every year, every album that I've done on Synclavier has gotten more and more sophisticated. . So compared to what I can do now, it sounds technically crude. The second one I did was the Mothers of Prevention album where I used the voices of people in congress.

Is it true that you had given up the guitar?

I did. I stopped playing it for the last 4 years. I only picked it up again in the last month. I keep it sitting next to my chair in the studio and I occasionally pluck around on it, but I'm only barely getting some callouses back. I literally hadn't touched it since December 23, 1984.

Why did you give it up?

I didn't think that there was any great demand in the marketplace for what I do on the guitar. I mean, why should I bust my chops, so to speak? There's plenty of people who play faster than I do, there's plenty of people who dance around more than I do, and there was nobody doing what I was doing on Synclavier. Rather than stand in line and be just another redundant guitar player plying his trade in the music business, I thought I'd better come up with something new.

But isn't there always going to be an audience for what you do? Does Frank Zappa really have to worry about the marketplace?

Sure. Certainly. Remember-I'm self financed. The money doesn't fly down from heaven or from a recording company. It's all what I can afford to spend to do what I do.

There is a practical side to making records. And then there is the amount of what you can refer to as assumable risk: How weird can you get and still make a living? I think I've

experimented well with the fringes of that concept. I'll take it to the max. I will stick my neck out. I'll make albums of stuff that if I had a normal record contract with a normal record company, I would have been dropped from their roster centuries ago.

Some of the things that I've recorded that I happen to like the best are the things that people in the marketplace find the most repulsive about what I do. Songs like "The Dangerous Kitchen" or "The Jazz Discharge Party Hats" are unique in American popular music. There are no two other songs that are in that same style.

If you ask anybody what their favorite song is that I've done, most people would say "Peaches in Regalia" or "Mudshark." They have little or no concept of what some of the other more adventurous things would have been.

Your newest album, Jazz from Hell, contains all instrumentals. Is this because you feel restricted by the song form and feel freer to express yourself without words?

It's two different mediums for me. When you're writing a song with words you have one kind of job to do. I look at that challenge as to how do you take something that is basically in my case prose data and try to make the prose data rhyme with itself and not compete with the notes that are connected to it. So that's the game I involve myself with when I have to write a song with words. When writing an instrumental song, you don't have to make those two things fit together, so it's a different challenge.

So by talking about prose data, do you mean that you work on the words first before the music?

Not always. Sometimes I start with a complicated instrumental line and just for the hell of it see whether I can write words to it. "Inca Rose" is one of the songs that came out that way. It was originally done as a kind of fusion instrumental. I said, "If somebody has to sing this, and it is fiendishly hard to sing, what would be the words that fit on it as it came out?" "Montana" was done the other way. It was like an old story song. The chord changes and notes were fitted in later.

Another example of long prose data that had a musical setting put to it is a song called "Dumb All Over". I wrote it on a Lufthansa flight from Frankfurt to L.A., and it was pages and pages about the fundamentalist right and weird things that they do. And it took awhile to organize a setting that worked on that thing.

You talk about the words and music opposing each other

Sometimes they're supposed to. I think the irony of the setting is one of the things that can enhance the words or, if the words are used phonetically to assist the music, then you design your entire piece so that the words will definitely take a back seat. They'll just function as texture to the music.

An example of that type of writing would be 1950's "doo-wop" music. The "Doo-run-un". Now what does that mean? But that's your song.

And you have a great love for those fifties songs.

Well, it was the first rock & roll that I heard. It was like a brand new invention when I was going to high school. So I've got a pretty thorough grounding in that musical tradition.

Is that all you were listening to at that time or did you get into classical music too?

No, I was buying rhythm and blues records and avant-garde 20th century classical music at the same time and loving both.

I know Varèse was a major influence.

Well, see, in those days, albums were very expensive, and there were no albums of rock and roll music. The rock and roll album was something that came along long after the rock and roll single was invented, and the original first rock and roll albums were just compilations of hits. If the label had a bunch of hits they would just stick them onto an album. The first one that I ever saw was called Teenage Dance Party that had a bunch of songs from a New York label – I can see it now, it's orange – that was the first one I got. I think the wisdom in the marketplace was that the teenagers wouldn't spend money on albums, they'd spend it on a single but it was a major investment to spend more money on a big record to play it on a slower machine. Remember – most teenagers in those days had 45 rpm record players with a big nozzle in the middle of it that you can't play a LP on. So only a few of the consumers in the rock and roll marketplace actually had a machine that could play an album.

Anyway, I was not really financially in good condition in those days, but I managed to buy two contemporary classical LP's that I listened to day and night, because it was the only two albums I had. I had a cheap recording of "The Rite of Spring" on Camden budget line. It was the "Worldwide Symphony plays the Rite of Spring". And the other one I had was "The Complete Works of Edward Varèse, Volume 1," which is on some obscure label called EMS.

Yeah? And you liked it?

Yeah, sure, right away. My kind of music.

Did you have any friends at the time who shared your enthusiasm for Varèse?

No, but I would play it for them anyway. I mean, usually if they'd come over to the house, everybody does this same thing, if you have records, you tend to play your favorite items for whoever comes in. And that gives them the test to find out what kind of person that individual is. What I used to do was play them parts of the Varèse album and then play them Lightning Slim things like "My Starter Won't Start" or "Have Your Way" or I'd play them some Howling Wolf. That would clear them out really fast.

They didn't like that stuff either?

Well, usually that would get rid of the girls and the ignorant boys and what was left over was somebody you could have a conversation with.

It's interesting that you mention these two separate currents because I was introduced to your work by a classical cello player who mostly listens to avant-garde 20th century music and you.

Well, he's missing a good bet by not checking out those old records by guys like Lonesome Sundown and Lightning Slim. That's good stuff because it's real direct, it's not a matter of pretense there. It's right to the point.

Did you start writing music at this time?

I was writing chamber music. I didn't write a rock and roll song until I was about 20 or 21. But I've been writing chamber music since I was 14.

Did you study keyboard?

No. I started writing music because I liked the way it looked and I had art talent when I was a kid, so I used to draw music. I figured that's what everybody else did, you know, just draw it till you liked the way it looked and then handed it to a musician. Theoretically a person who could read dots on paper and then translate your engraving into some kind of audio masterpiece. And I did, since I didn't know any musicians, labor under this delusion for quite some time and just draw music.

Without being able to read it?

Right, I couldn't read it. I could write it. I could make it look terrific.

Were you basing these drawings on any sheet music that you looked at?

No. I'd seen pictures of music before and I knew how to draw the clefs. That might sound ignorant and impractical but I would say there are many contemporary scores that probably don't sound as good as what I was doodling on paper.

In fact there was a reference – I guess in the early fifties – to a certain type of music common in the contemporary European tradition called "Eye Music". You couldn't play it and you didn't want to listen to it but it looked great on paper. I didn't find out about this concept until I managed to get these things played by musicians and I got the shock of my life when I realized that it didn't sound like what I wanted it to sound like. So at that point I had to find out how the system really worked.

And that's when you learned music theory?

The standard theory that I know is really quite limited because I always found it quite boring. I got a hold of the Walter Piston harmony book when I was in high school and I went through some of the exercises in there. And I was wondering why a person would really want to devote a lifetime to doing this, because after you complete it you'll sound like everybody else who used the same rules. So I learned enough of the basic stuff so I got the concept of what harmony was supposed to do, what voice leading was supposed to do, how melody was supposed to function in a harmonic climate, what rhythm was supposed to do. I learned all of that and then chucked the rest of it.

I started writing my own music in which the thirds were omitted from the chords. That seemed to give me more latitude with the melody because if there's no third in the chord then you're not locked into an exact statement that your harmonic climate is major or minor. If you have a root, a fourth and a fifth, or a root, a second and a fifth, your ability to create atmosphere and imply harmony by having a variety of bass notes that will argue with the suspended chord gives you, for my taste, more opportunities. Then the melody

line can go back and forth between major or minor and lydian or whatever else you want with ease. You have more flexibility.

But even to take that approach you'd have to have the understanding of how a triad is structured and the effect of a third.

Yeah, but that's really basic beginner mongoloid stuff.

Yes, but at the same time there are many writers who are at that stage and don't know what a third is.

They don't want to know. I think that when you have award shows that glorify the most ignorant among us for doing things that are called excellent merely because they've achieved large numerical sales, it is not much of an incentive for a young songwriter to come along and say, "I want to learn how music works." Because there's just no reason to participate in the construction of music on an intellectual level when all you have to do is just get lucky one time and then have the record company do the payola. Then you will be the next guy to be standing in line to get a major award. So that's the message that is sent to the marketplace for all the new guys coming in. And there's no glamour to doing the laborious job of developing a personal theory of harmony or a personal feel for how you want rhythm to function in your work.

See, I make a distinction between a songwriter and a composer. They're not always the same kind of a guy because the goals of the two types of disciplines are not always the same. Composers may write songs, but it is a very seldom that a songwriter will do a composition.

A composition is when you're dealing just in a theoretical and abstract way with the raw elements of music, and trying to do things with those basic elements which has not been done before. Instead of sitting down to write a hit, you're going to the raw material to go in a new direction.

Songwriters tend not to do that. They tend to write in a song form. And if you compare it to architecture, it's the difference between building a cathedral and building a Taco Bell. And fast food is important when you're hungry. Fast music is important when you need something to drive to.

Is it your opinion that the state of songwriting is bad and getting worse?

No, the only thing that saves it is the fact that the American's memory span is so short that they actually believe that when they hear the latest regurgitated version of a style that was prevalent five years ago, they believe it's new. I mean, I'm amazed that some of the stuff that is passing for New Wave music today is 1960's semi-folk-rock chord changes that have been reorchestrated to use 1980's technology. It really is the same.

Have you heard any songs recently that you thought were worthwhile?

I like "Living in a Box" by Living in a Box, and I like "Daddy's Home" by Walk the Moon.

So it is possible to use that very restrictive song form and still create something good?

Sure, it is always possible. But when a guy sits down to write a song, he's not sitting down to make history, he's sitting down to make money.

Do you really believe that is always the case? Don't you think there are some songwriters who want to write some timeless songs?

I don't think the urge to be timeless necessarily permeates the pop tune marketplace. The urge to be rich permeates the pop tune marketplace.

That's true, though I know the urge to be timeless does exist among songwriters, although they have to face the reality of the music business.

Any songwriter who had to choose between being rich and being timeless, if he chose timeless, he's probably out of a job. There are just too many commercial pressures on the guy at the end of the food chain, the guy who writes the song, because before he thinks about anything else, he's already looking at airplay or looking at MTV. I think there's got to be an inkling in the back of every songwriter's mind like, "How will this shoot ? What will they do when they make a video of this one?" So what's that got to do with writing a song?

Not much. But isn't it possible for something new and great to be heard-even if it doesn't fit the pat hit-making formula?

Not unless there's a massive change of attitude at the distribution level, which includes the places where music is dispersed: radio, TV, jukeboxes, whatever, until current values disappear. Until then, there is little hope that a person who is doing anything other than formula swill will have an opportunity to have his music recorded, let alone transmitted.

But don't you feel that there's an inherent need among people to have serious, expressive music as a part of their lives?

The problem with that concept is – would they know it if they heard it? Would they like it or would they prefer it to other stuff? See, an audience gets trained. They're trained by their environment. And what they hear on the radio has nothing to do with life – it's all freeze-dried and dead. It's like dead artifacts that are repeated over and over again. The repetition helps to sell records, but the repetition reduces the composition to the level of wallpaper.

Does it?

Sure. Especially in the radio sense, you don't hear it anymore. It's a rock and roll atmosphere that you play in your car, that you hear in an elevator, that you experience in a boutique. It has reduced wallpaper to a lifestyle.

But a great song, even if I hear it a billion times, can still move me. It can't ever become wallpaper, no matter how many times it gets played.

But let's take a look at the broad spectrum of what everybody knows as common American coinage, the musical experience of being an American. The boundary of your musical experience has been determined by accountants. Unless you are going to seek out the newest and the finest of whatever is available in any field, what you are presented with as your set of alternatives that you will choose to inhabit your lifestyle is tiny.

Because of the way that the business is structured? If a record sells 50,000 copies, it's a commercial failure. But you're still reaching 50,000 people. Would you consider that a failure, even if you're reaching that many people and affecting that many lives?

If you were a classical composer and you sold 50,000 albums, you'd be a hero. I mean, the regular pop industry spits at 50,000 records. I regularly do 50,000 records. The only album I ever had that was in the million plus category was Sheik Yerbouti and the only reason that it sold that much is because the song "Bobby Brown Goes Down" which could never be played in the U.S., was a hit all over Europe. The bulk of those sales were outside the U.S. so it was an unpredictable fluke. Usually my record sales are in the 50,000 to 300,000 range depending on what the content of the album is.

Do you consider sales of 50,000 records to be a failure?

I think that that's about the bottom margin for feeling okay given what it costs to make an album. You know, the success, if you're going to look at it in financial terms, you have to look at the difference between what you spend to make it and what it nets you after it's gone into the marketplace. And because I have my own studio and do my own stuff, I can actually make a profit at 50,000 records, where another guy probably could not.

So what would be your advice to the young songwriter when he sits down to write a song- should he concern himself with writing a good hook or should he simply try to write a great song?

It depends on what he wants to do. If he just wants to make money, he should copy everybody else's stuff, which is what everybody else is doing.

But you can only do that for so long.

That depends on how good a copier you are.

How about if you want a career in songwriting?

Basically, it's a career in being a fraud. It's just like when someone says, "What would you advise a young composer?" I always say, "Get a real estate license." You can't earn a living being a composer in the United States. But as far as being a songwriter goes, you can make a lot of money if you will listen for what everybody else has done that has been successful, and tweak it around to the point where you can convince an accountant at a record company that you're fresh, new and original. This is usually accomplished by changing your hairdo periodically and having a good wardrobe. That's basically the business you're entering. The idea of writing a nice tune is the farthest thing from the minds of the people you will be doing business with, and that is the reality of the business.

Recently we interviewed the songwriting team of Livingston & Evans who said that they didn't think that a good melody had been written in about thirty years.

I'd say that's probably true, because the basic thrust of today's music is dance music, especially for Americans, who have an incredibly limited concept of what rhythm is. If you look at the typical dance rhythms that motivate an American dancer, you're very close to march music. It's boom-bap-boom-bap, and if there's anything more than that, an American's feet get tangled up.

So you start with a basic sort of fascist marching beat, and then you add a few parallel fifths to it (if you want it to be heavy metal) and make sure that your melodies don't have anything shorter than an eighth note. Make sure that there is an incredible amount of repetition in the composition, because you're presuming that when people are out there semi-marching and pumping their buttocks up and down that they couldn't really comprehend any more than a five note melody.

If you were to were to do a statistical analysis of some of the most popular, big selling tunes that have been on the market in recent days, you'd see not too many notes, the chords don't give you too many surprises, and the beat is boom-bap. So if you want to do that and make a lot of money, it's not too hard to learn. But if you want to write the great American tune, I would say to get a real estate license.

Do you have an album of your own that is a favorite?

By the time I finish working on an album, I never want to hear it again in my life.

And you don't?

No, I do, sometimes. For example, we're releasing the old masters collections and the old things have to be remixed or remastered again and you do get to hear them again. But usually what I hear is everything that went wrong during a session. It's very seldom that I'll listen to a song and say, "Yeah, that's a good song," because by the time I'm finished doing the grunt work of putting an album together, the initial thrill of writing the song has vanished.

If you are the artist and the producer and the record company president and the art director, after doing all those jobs it becomes a blurr; the original songwriting idea is just something that happened in ancient history.

And when you're in the studio you don't reconnect with that original inspiration at all?

No. That's a one shot deal.

If you had to name a few songs, written by other people, that you consider to be great, what would they be?

I liked "Subterranean Homesick Blues" by Bob Dylan. I liked "Paperback Writer" by the Beatles and "I am the Walrus." And one may not underestimate the impact of "Louie Louie," the original Richard Berry version.

Were those the only songs by Dylan and the Beatles that you like or do you like them in general?

No, those are the only ones I liked. I generally liked the Rolling Stones better than the Beatles during that era; they were a little bit more to my taste because they were more involved in the blues.

I like the group Them, with Van Morrison. And the other thing that I really enjoyed were the early compositions of David and Bacharach. I thought that they were so good because prior to that time there had been little of bitonal or polytonal harmonic implication in

American pop music, and we are to thank them for providing them through those early Dionne Warwick recordings.

What do you think of the New York school of composers, such as Phillip Glass?

I'm not familiar with his music but the whole realm of the New York school of repetition music, it's like stuff to be played in the background of an art gallery. It's an atmosphere that people might enjoy participating in, but it's not my style; it's not my idea of a good time.

Should we expect in the future that most of your work will be on the Synclavier as opposed to working with a band?

I don't think it will be exclusively that because there's still certain things human beings do better than machines. One thing about human beings, though, is that they really enjoy being paid. And one thing about doing records that are not selling 30 million units is you have to be very conscious of what you're spending to make the record so one day you have made a profit that allows you to make another record. That's another reason why that machine (the Synclavier) is sitting there.

Do you find any satisfaction in your enormous body of work and the knowledge that it will remain?

Not in a way that you can identify with. You know, I think that what you have in mind is probably something more romantic than the way I look at it.

How do you look at it?

Well, all of the songs that were dealing with sociological topics were things that needed to be said at the time. The comments made then still remain true today and will probably remain true as long as we have bad government and ignorant religion working in America. And on that basis I think they serve a sociological function as an encouragement to other people who have a similar point of view.

Modern Music Is a Sick Puppy

A Conversation with Frank Zappa by Steve Birchall
from Digital Audio, October/November 1984

Sitting in his digital recording studio, Frank Zappa talks about how a creative personality approaches the studio. Along the way, he reveals how he makes use of his digital equipment -- his extended musical instruments.

"A mixing console is just like a musical instrument," he declares. "And all these other things sitting on the wall here are tools that you use to make musical sounds."

Recently, Zappa's Barking Pumpkin Records became one of the first studios to acquire the Sony 32-track digital recorder. After working with it, what does Zappa think about digital recording? "The sound is clear, and the dynamic range is ridiculous," he said. "Little things like that make all the difference."

Zappa stopped touring two years ago, and turned his attention toward establishing himself in the world of contemporary music as a the serious composer he is, and always has been. His fans are aware of his expertise in writing music for orchestra and chamber groups; now they'll have a chance to hear some of Zappa's more serious output.

But, like all serious composers who have gone before him, he has suffered contempt, lack of performances, bad performances, and lack of recognition. As a result, Zappa has returned to rock 'n' roll.

In this conversation with Digital Audio's Steve Birchall, Zappa talks about his work in both contemporary and rock music, as well as his production and engineering experiences. And he also provides his insight on the present state of American life and culture.

Steve Birchall: Why did you convert your studio to a digital facility? What creative possibilities did digital recording offer that analog technology couldn't give you?

Frank Zappa: It's made a big difference in terms of what we can get on tape and how fast. You can do sounds on digital that you can't on analog. The sound is clear, and the dynamic range is ridiculous. Little things like that make all the difference in the world.

Steve Birchall: Do you like the expanded dynamic range? Have you found ways to make use of it creatively?

Frank Zappa: We don't compress the material; we leave the dynamic range wide open and usually worry about it when we put it on disc. If you compress everything just because you're putting it on vinyl, then you eventually wind up cheating the audience who buy it on CD. We're looking forward to doing a CD release. So far we haven't. Eventually we'll put out something on CD and you'll really be able to appreciate the difference between your "ordinary digital product" and your Barking Pumpkin digital product.

Steve Birchall: Why haven't you put out anything on CD?

Frank Zappa: Because originally when we tried to do it, we were told that first, the artist has to pay them (the developers of the CD) a royalty to press it on CD. I said forget it. They've since discontinued that policy. But still, the problem is that a lot of people would like to do CDs, but the manufacturing capacity of the plants isn't large enough to accommodate every artist who would like to do a CD. They can't manufacture enough. Right now the pressing capacity is still small, and they usually want to press CDs only for artists who sell 30 million copies. I'm not one of those kind of guys, so it'll be a long time before you hear one of my things on CD.

Steve Birchall: I hope that changes. I was looking forward to hearing the Orchestral Works on CD, but I guess I'll have to wait.
Frank Zappa: It's going to be a while. That may change, actually. I just did an album (with Pierre Boulez) that Angel/EMI is releasing. They've been talking about doing it on CD. It'll be out in a couple of months. Boulez conducted three of my pieces. The rest of the album is electronic music I did with the Synclavier here at the studio.
Steve Birchall: How did Boulez respond to your music?
Frank Zappa: Well, I guess he liked it -- he conducted it. I don't suppose he has to conduct anything he doesn't like.
Steve Birchall: You often incorporate a lot of things from the avant-garde -- particularly from that period in the '50s when Boulez and Stockhausen were prominent.
Frank Zappa: I'm still quite fond of Boulez's music, but not so much so of Stockhausen's stuff. I like other things in contemporary music, too, particularly Takemitsu. He's one of my favorites. But if you want to be honest about it, modern music is a sick puppy. I think the situation is so drastic that we ought to just let nature take its course.
Steve Birchall: Yes, I certainly agree with you. I'm a composer, and I long ago stopped writing orchestral music. There was just no possibility of a performance.
Frank Zappa: Yup. Me too.
Steve Birchall: But now you are writing again.
Frank Zappa: No, no I'm not. The pieces that were performed (with Boulez) were all written some time ago. I haven't written anything for large orchestra since the pieces I recorded with the London Symphony, and I don't expect to do it ever again.
Steve Birchall: How long ago did you write those pieces?
Frank Zappa: Late '70s, early '80s.
Steve Birchall: Listening to the Orchestral Works album, I really was astonished at the imaginative sounds that were coming out of the orchestra.
Frank Zappa: Yeah, well, I can write good music. The only problem is that I can't get people to play it. The LSO album is not what I would call the world's most accurate reading. And it cost a fortune to do it. There's no way I can ever make back what it cost me to produce that recording. What it has brought me are offers to perform from guys like Jack Elliott and his "New American Orchestra." He called the office the other day, requesting 15 minutes of my easiest pieces to conduct at one of their concerts. He offered me one hour of rehearsal time.
Steve Birchall: But that's not adequate. It won't work -- not for new music in manuscript.
Frank Zappa: That's right. I said no, forget it. The other thing that really soured me on the serious music world was a concert I did a few years back with a 40-piece chamber orchestra in Royce Hall (at UCLA). After the concert I was approached by the Los Angeles Philharmonic. They said if you'll buy us two concert grand pianos and give them to us as a gift, we'll commission you to write a double piano concerto for the Philharmonic.
Steve Birchall: That was really generous of them.
Frank Zappa: Yeah, really sweet. The sickest thing that has happened recently -- what really showed me what bad shape modern music is in -- was an incident with a group call the Ear Unit. It's two percussion, two keyboards, flute, clarinet, and cello. They commissioned a piece to be performed at the Monday Evening Concerts at the County Museum. They specifically requested an arrangement of one of the tunes on the guitar album -- a piece called "While You Were Out." So I did it. And I did it here on the computer. When it came time for them to pick up their parts, I played them the electronic realization on the Synclavier so they could have an idea of how it should sound. They said, "We can't play this. We don't have enough time to rehearse it, because we're playing Elliott Carter and that's hard, and we're playing this other thing, and that's hard, and we really don't have time to do this." So I said, " Well, you're either going to play it right or you're not going to play it at all." They already had announced they were going to play it. The thing

was already on the program, so the problem was solved in this manner: I said, "Here's what we'll do -- I'll have the computer simulate the sound of all the instruments in your group, and I'll make a digital recording of this piece (the only time a composer ever got a perfect performance of a brand new piece at it premiere). I had the computer print out the parts for each musician. Then I made an analog cassette for each musician of what his part was supposed to sound like. That frees the performer to do what he really wants to do, which is look good on stage. He doesn't have to worry about a single note, because the machine takes care of that. Since there were to have been some other pieces with amplification at the concert, I said, "OK, great, you're already going to have wires coming out of your instruments, so just go out there, push the button on the Sony PCM-F1 cassette, and out comes a perfect performance of the piece. You guys work on your choreography, and bingo, we have the missing link between electronic music and 'performance art.'" So they did it. But they didn't know the difference between VHS and Beta., so when it came time to play the cassette, they couldn't use it. So what did they do? They used one of the analog practice cassettes, which put a wall of hiss out into the audience. I didn't go to the concert, but a friend of mine did. He said you could hardly make out the music; it was a wall of hiss. Nobody knew that they didn't play a note. Not the man who runs the Monday Evening Concerts, not Morton Subotnick, not either of the reviewers for the Los Angeles Times or the Herald Examiner....

Steve Birchall: Not even through all that hiss and distortion? They probably thought it was just another bad sound reinforcement system....

Frank Zappa: Eventually, a guy from the LA Times editorial department called me up (after the reviewer had said how this group "played modern music with such vibrance"). He had heard from one of the members of the group what had actually happened, so he was a little embarrassed, and he's probably going to do another article about it. I said, "Do me a favor. Before you write it, come over to my studio and let me play you a recording of the piece the way it was supposed to sound, so you know what you're talking about." So far he hasn't been over. To me that's indicative of the type of attention, the type of stuff that goes on in the modern music world. The other thing that I found disappointing happened about a month ago. I was the keynote speaker at the American Society of University Composers (ASUC) in Columbus, OH. I went there and did the speech. For three nights they had concerts of new music and they had one of my pieces in the program each night. The first night they played "Naval Aviation and Art," which is a piece about 2 1/2 minutes long. It was OK. It's really not a very hard piece -- passable performance on that. The next afternoon, they had a chamber group that made an attempt to play "The Black Page Number Two." Murdered it. Couldn't get anywhere near what the thing was supposed to sound like. The third night, the Columbus Symphony was supposed to play the U.S. premiere of "The Perfect Stranger," which was one of the pieces Boulez conducted, along with a bunch of brand new pieces by other composers who were at the convention. I went to several of the rehearsals and noticed there was a problem with their harpist. In my piece there is a situation where the harp has to play a fairly difficult melody with the oboe. She couldn't do it, so I just told the conductor to leave her out. Then I noticed there was a composer named Nancy Chance who had written a piece that had massive harp parts in it. The harpist couldn't play those parts at all, and the harp is the predominant thing in her piece, so I talked with the conductor, and the situation was explained to me this way: This woman has lifetime tenure in the orchestra. You can't even pay her to stay home. The union in Columbus threatens to shut everybody down if you mess with their harp player. There are other competent harpists in town, but the union refuses to let the orchestra hire anybody other than this woman. So who's the loser? The composer loses big. The audience loses, because they don't get to hear what the piece is really about. The attitude in the performance community there is "our hands are tied. It's a union rule." It's baloney -- but that's what happens for real in the classical music world. For these reasons, I have

said, "OK, that's it. I've been doing this seriously for two years now. I stopped touring two years ago and spent the last two years in Modern Music Land -- and I'm leaving." I'm going back on the road. Rehearsals started May 21. That's it...

Pop Music and Technical Techniques

Steve Birchall: Would you say the most experimental music has been in pop music, with all the stuff that's been going on in the studio?
Frank Zappa: No, I wouldn't say it's experimental. Timbrally, maybe it's experimental.
Steve Birchall: What about the development of the multi-track studio in the '60s and all the new recording techniques that came out of that world?
Frank Zappa: But that's not a musical technique; that's a technical technique. The most reactionary music on this planet is popular music. Its restrictions are even more rigorous than in classical music. In order for it to be popular music, it must be this, this, and this. Those rhythms. These chord changes. This type of melody. This type of lyrics. You have no choice, and if you don't do it, you can't survive.
Steve Birchall: But you've stepped outside the boundaries more than most -- had have been fairly successful at it.
Frank Zappa: Yeah, I've been outside the boundaries. But you don't sell 30 million albums that way. If you're willing to take the risk, you can do it. The fact of the matter is that a person who works in the pop music field understands what can be done in a recording studio and has access to musical tools and facilities that have the possibility to make a totally astonishing kind of music. You can make impossible things happen on tape. That's what I like to do. The problem arises only when you have to deal with musicians, because a lot of the things that I'm interested in hearing are very difficult for human beings to play. That's why I'm happy that the Synclavier came along, because it's brightened my life considerably. The sequencer in this thing is powerful. The software lets you do and hear things that are -- ridiculous. I can't really play the piano, but I load stuff in through the keyboard and I'm totally satisfied with the results. The only drawbacks are certain limitations in the music printing and the fact that it's difficult to interface with other machines.
Steve Birchall: During the recent AES Conference in Anaheim, I hear a lot of talk about your Orchestral Works album. Your name came up quite a number of times in the various sessions. Your use of Pressure Zone Mikes was one of the topics; why did you choose PZMs? What advantages do they have over conventional types of mikes?
Frank Zappa: I got a type of isolation, plus a feeling of "airiness" that I couldn't get with any other mikes. We tried to get a good concert hall in England, but they were all booked up, so we wound up recording the entire LSO album at Twickenham Studios -- in a totally dead movie soundstage. That's one of the worst kinds of environments to put an orchestra into, because the sound just dies, and the musicians can't really hear each other, so they can't get the right balance.
Steve Birchall: Did you multi-mike it?
Frank Zappa: It was a multi-track recording using about 60 inputs. Of course, about 20 were for the drum set alone.
Steve Birchall: Did you put them on the floor, or overhead?
Frank Zappa: Every way you can imagine. We had little scoop plastic dish things that went over pairs of violin stands. We had little wedges that sat on the floor in front of the celli and basses. We had big 4 by 4 plexiglass sheets hung on the wall behind the percussion. We experimented around. We tried normal mikes that people use for orchestral instruments. The leakage and the loss of control that we had was a big problem. In recording an orchestra, you know it's going to be an ambient recording anyway, but you'd at least like the instrument you're featuring on that mike to be predominant on that track. We liked it

with the PZMs. They have a couple of problems, but I don't know whether they've solved them yet. The PZMs have a sound all their own -- some people like it and some people don't. The other problem is that the wires coming out of them are small. People have a tendency to step on them and kick them. Then, during the middle of your recording, you say, "What is that crackle?" Then you've got to go out there and find which of the 30 or 40 microphones had its wire disturbed.
Steve Birchall: That's a real, practical problem that nobody has given much attention to.
Frank Zappa: We discussed all this with Ken Wahrenbrock [an authority on PZMs], and gave him a full report on all the things we encountered that were negative when we did the recording over there. I hope that some of the ideas get incorporated. He's a real nice man -- he's been over here a number of times, and he's worked with us trying to help us get the right stuff to do there recordings. I used a couple of PZMs on the Boulez recording, in the ambient position.
Steve Birchall: It really requires learning a whole new technique of working with microphones. It takes quite a lot of time to understand what the results of various placements will be on the recording.
Frank Zappa: Usually everybody is concerned with the budget. It's not that I'm not concerned with the budget, but some people are concerned to the exclusion of any type of experimentation. They won't even take a minute to try something, because they just want to do it the old way, even if it's wrong.
Steve Birchall: That's what stops progress.
Frank Zappa: No. What stops progress in the U.S. is that there are too many lawyers and too many accountants. Aesthetic decisions in music and the other arts have all been placed into the hands of there people, so we're now at the mercy of their taste.
Steve Birchall: It's true in classical music, in pop music -- no matter where you look. It's done a lot of damage to the record industry, because all they want now is monster hits.
Frank Zappa: That's right. Just like the movie business.
Steve Birchall: Young artists don't have a chance.
Frank Zappa: Well, no, record companies will take a chance on a young artist. As a matter of fact, the business works like this now: They'll sign lots of young artists -- for peanuts -- and they get one chance. One chance only. If you make a mistake, you're dead; if you make a monster hit, you stay. It's as simple as that. And the budgets they give these new artists are inadequate for making a good record.
Steve Birchall: I was talking with someone at Hitsville, and they have a plan for allowing new artists to experiment -- for free -- in the basement studios with older equipment. They let them find out how to approach the studio with older equipment. They let them find out how to approach the studio, how to plan before a session, and how to use it most effectively, before they go into the expensive studios upstairs.
Frank Zappa: Ah, that sounds interesting. You could get quite a tax write-off. That's the only reason it would happen. Do you think they'll take anybody with a new idea and let them go in there to work on it? I doubt that. I think they're going to take only those who have "love songs" to sing.

Digital Editing

Steve Birchall: You've done a lot of razor blade editing on digital tapes -- two thousand splices on one hour of tape.
Frank Zappa: Yes, probably more. I've probably done more of them than anybody else using digital. This also includes the pieces which didn't go into the LSO album, because we still have some pieces awaiting release. But in putting that album together, I used four rolls of splicing tape -- one inch per splice. That two thousand splices per roll. I wont' say they all worked. You definitely have to learn how to do it, or it can be one of the most

unpleasant experiences on the planet. If you're doing only assembly edits (putting a series of songs together for an album), usually you don't have a problem. You know where the splice will be when you're hooking one song to another. But the minute you change your mind and break that splice and try to reassemble it, the risk of getting a snap or a dropout goes up immensely. The worst thing you can do is to unmake a splice and put it back together in the middle of a song. In other words, you are reassembling the Control Track (which contains information on the recorder needs for decoding the digital data). Whenever you disrupt that data stream, you cause a lot of problems, and the machine puts out snaps and pops. You get to be extremely careful -- and you can't take as many chances as you would in analog editing. Have you ever tried to edit orchestral music [with a razor blade]? It's really hard. If you're editing rock 'n' roll you listen to where the kick drum is, or where the cymbal is, and there's you edit point. It's an easy to cut to find. But if you're cutting into the middle of a clarinet note or a string wash, it's very difficult to rock the tape and find where the starting point of that sound is. It's very tedious.
Steve Birchall: This is what they say is so great about electronic editing.
Frank Zappa: I haven't used it yet but I couldn't imagine it being as easy to use as doing it the old way by just turning a knob. Maybe I have a treat coming. It's also another $50,000 dollars.

"New Stuff"

Steve Birchall: What type of material are you working on?
Frank Zappa: The new stuff that's coming out now includes a new rock 'n' roll album. We also have the first boxed set of the digital refurbishment of the old masters. All the original Verve albums from Freak Out to Reuben and the Jets have been digitally re-spiffed and remixed. The box set includes a mystery disc with unreleased material and historic material of that period. I also have an album of the music of Francesco Zappa. He was a composer who flourished between 1766 and 1788. Nobody knows when he was born or when he died. He was a cello player from Milan and wrote mostly string trios. I found out about his music and located a bunch of it in the Berkeley Library and the Library of Congress. My assistant loaded it into the Synclavier and now we have a whole album of synthesized performances.
Steve Birchall: What is his music like?
Frank Zappa: He was a contemporary of Mozart. It's kind of happy, Italian-sounding music. It's nice, and real melodic. It's interesting, too; he does a few strange things harmonically that seem to be slightly ahead of his time -- a few little weird things. Basically, it's typical of music of that period, except it doesn't sound typical when it comes out of the Synclavier. The other album that's ready for release is the new rock 'n' roll album called Them or Us. And the three-record set is the complete soundtrack to Thing-Fish, the Broadway show I wrote. It hasn't been produced and probably never will be, because it's just a little bit on the weird side for people who invest in Broadway.
Steve Birchall: One of the things that's so wonderful about your music is that you always pop the bubble of popular lifestyles in a satirical way.
Frank Zappa: Well, it's hard for me to take all that crap seriously.
Steve Birchall: You're a keen observer. You find those things and you point them out.
Frank Zappa: But nobody wants to look at it when you point it out.
Steve Birchall: What about "Valley Girl"?
Frank Zappa: "Valley Girl" was a success not because people liked what the song said, but because they liked the dialect in the monologue and wanted to talk just like that.
Steve Birchall: "Sheik Yerbouti" was another one. You took the disco stuff and poked fun at it.

Frank Zappa: Disco won't die. Economics won't let it die. The economics of playing a recording a place with alcohol rather than hiring a band necessitates that disco lives.
Steve Birchall: It's a continuous blur -- you can't tell when one song ends and the next one starts.
Frank Zappa: There's a good reason for that. Accountants like it that way, so it usually gets made that way. That's what accountants dance to. If they dance at all, they dance to that kind of music, so they support it. They're solidly behind it. And it's very bottom-line-oriented music.

Zappa Mixing Techniques

Steve Birchall: How do you approach a mixdown, once you've laid down all your tracks?
Frank Zappa: I like a certain style of mix. Whenever I imagine an instrument as part of a mix, I have an ideal mental picture of what it is supposed to sound like for its function in the mix. I have in my mind an ideal kick drum sound, an ideal snare drum sound, a lot of different types of ideal guitar sounds, ideal vibe and bells, and so on. Then I take the raw material and try to equalize it and blend it to make it into what that ideal sound quality is, because that's what I want to say musically.
Steve Birchall: So you've really conceived the mix before you start to lay down tracks?
Frank Zappa: I conceive the mix before I write the music, because the mix is part of the composition. And that's one of the advantages for a composer who knows how to work in a studio. You know what you can do in terms of balancing things. You can spit in the face of the laws of acoustics by pushing a couple of faders up and down. You can make one flute in the low octave sound louder than an entire orchestra if you want.
Steve Birchall: In your electronic pieces you've also done the same thing by conceiving the mix as part of the composition. Electronic music gets really dangerous because you have so many sounds that you can make. But I like the way you've restricted the range to a collection of sounds that are all related.
Frank Zappa: Most electronic music people use space-type sounds and stick them all together. My interest in electronic instruments is to get accurate performances of pitches, rhythms, and harmony -- which are what I think music ought to be made out of. I like noise, too, as color. But as a way of life it's not exactly my idea of a good time. Since my compositions are made out of pitches, melody, and harmony, I choose familiar sounds that are easy to identify with from the real world. That way, you can concentrate on what the music is about, rather than on the science fiction nature of the machine.
Steve Birchall: I see you have a Lexicon digital reverb unit up there. I think artificial room acoustics may become one of the biggest areas of interest in pop music. With digital recording, you really have to work on creating the kind of acoustical environment you want the music to be in.
Frank Zappa: Well, in this studio, we have three live reverb chambers -- good ones too. I have one little one right underneath the control room. I have a medium-sized one out there -- a long narrow one along the rear wall. That white room back there is another acoustic chamber. It's very live. We have two Lexicon 224Xs and two of the older Lexicons in the truck. We have an Ursa Major Space Station, three Eventide Harmonizers, and AMS, and two Prime Times. So we do quite a bit of ambience simulation here and have a lot of different aromas to choose from.
Steve Birchall: That kind of flexibility is wonderful because inventing your own kind of acoustic space is a lot of fun.
Frank Zappa: That's one of the most interesting aspects of the London Symphony Orchestra album. Using a bunch of home-made room programs on the 224X, I changed the size and shape of the imaginary rooms, according to the mood of each portion of the piece. Later, I edited the tapes so you go smoothly from one acoustic space to another --

from a big room, to a vast space, and back. It changes the way you hear the music. If a composer has access to all the tools of production all the way down the line, he can optimize the sound for that particular piece. He can make it sound exactly the way he thinks it ought to sound. No longer is the composer stuck with one performance in one room.
Steve Birchall: It becomes part of the creative process as well. It's part of the composition.
Frank Zappa: A mixing console is just like a musical instrument. And all these other things that are sitting on the wall here are tools that you use to make musical sounds.
Steve Birchall: Absolutely. But often, people want to argue strenuously against the use of technology in a composition.
Frank Zappa: Well, they're ignorant -- totally ignorant.
Steve Birchall: Mixing consoles are creative tools, as much as guitars and pianos. Tom Holman (in his talk on film audio production at the the AES conference) mentioned that the newer Lexicons have programs to simulate much smaller rooms -- like telephone booths in outer space. Everybody has been focusing on big-sounding rooms -- large concert halls and cathedrals. But small rooms have applications too, especially in films.
Frank Zappa: Well, this one has dialog rooms programmed into it. They're especially useful when you're "looping" dialog onto a film's audio tracks. The Lexicon can make your loop match the ambience of the room you see on screen, or of the room where other dialog already has been recorded. It has programs that simulate small rooms, like a living room, or a garage, and all those different kinds of places.
Steve Birchall: Do you make much use of the small rooms?
Frank Zappa: Not as small rooms, because I don't do a lot of that kind of work. I've cross-bred some of the programs. We took the numerical parameters of the large concert hall program and inserted them into one of the living room programs and got a strange kind of room out of it. Lexicon has a plate program called "cathedral," which has some very strange characteristics and we crossed that with the small concert hall program. It's neat to mess around with -- I really love that device. It's one of my favorite tools to make sounds with because you can do so much. For the rock 'n' roll stuff, we've been using split plate a lot. That program simulates the old EMT steel plate reverb chambers, and seems to give much better stereo definition. When you add echo to a mix, it makes the thing sound more expansive, but in a way it narrows your stereo width. Things tend to bunch up, but with the split place, they don't. Things retain their position in the mix a little bit better. Certain other things we do as just a matter of course -- standard operating procedure here. The snare always goes into a 949 on a certain setting that we use. The kick and the toms are always gated and EQed a certain way. The drum set layout in terms of its position in the mix is always the same, consistent from tape to tape. High hat is always mid-right, kick is always center, snare is always split, the castanets and the rototoms are always hard left and right.
Steve Birchall: Why do you do that? Wouldn't more variety be more interesting?
Frank Zappa: I like the idea of making my tapes, no matter what they are, so they're intercuttable with one another. It's less distracting to the listener. He can follow an album's conceptual continuity better if he doesn't get that drastic shock when the tone of things changes. The shock should be the idea of one type of music juxtaposed on another type of music, not the fact that the high hat suddenly jumps to the left.
Steve Birchall: Yes, that's pointless. You could do it for a reason, but generally it's pointless.
Frank Zappa: It's better if you can keep your foot tapping, no matter how weird the music is. If you can follow it all the way through, the song is more fun to listen to. The Kronos Quartet asked me to write a bunch of music for them. I've done it on the Synclavier, so I've actually been able to listen to the stuff played as string quartet, before they ever played it. In fact, I may even suggest they do the same thing as the Ear Unit. Don't bother to learn it, just turn the machine and sit there and pretend to play it.

Comments on a Demonstration

Steve Birchall: Let's hope they use the right tape this time! Do you also use the Fairlight?
Frank Zappa: No. I tried it and I didn't enjoy it very much because I didn't think it sounded good. The bandwidth of the sampler is too low (8 kHz or something like that), and everything sounded fake coming out. I very seldom use sampling (recording a live sound digitally and plugging it into the keyboard) on the Synclavier, but it's much more realistic than on the Fairlight.
Steve Birchall: It seems to be. It sure fooled me for a while.
Frank Zappa: You haven't heard any sampling out of it yet. All that you've heard so far has been synthesized. Those are all digitally synthesized sounds.
Steve Birchall: Synthesized from scratch -- I completely misunderstood what I was hearing.
Frank Zappa: Nothing from the real world was ever entered into the Synclavier -- no live instruments except where I said the drums are live. In order of appearance, you heard one section of Lumpy Gravy, followed by the first movement of Mo and Herb's Vacation, which was played by the London Symphony Orchestra. Then the next piece, that short little piece called Love Story, was completely synthesized. After that was Naval Aviation and Art, played by the Ensemble Intercontemporain with Boulez conducting. Then you heard The Girl in the Magnesium Dress, which uses a synthesized Fender Rhodes and vibes. Jonestown with the "chorus" and "strings," was all synthesized. It's Jonestown because you can here him kicking the Kool Aid can -- it's pretty grim.
Steve Birchall: As soon as you said the name of the piece, it all came together instantly. === "Modern Music Is a Sick Puppy" (Part 2) === Gone are the days of The Mothers of Invention, handwritten music manuscripts, and Frank Zappa's hopes of sustaining a career as a serious composer. Today, time and digital technology have rearranged the music -- but Zappa is still plugged in.
In this, the second installment of an exclusive Digital Audio interview, Zappa tells Technical Editor Steve Birchall how, with the help of his wide variety of signal processors, he refurbished old "Mothers" recordings for latter-day release. He also shares his views on kids an music videos, the disposable state of the arts, and the shrinking world of the composer in modern American society.
Steve Birchall: What kinds of signal processing did you use to reconstitute the old Verve tapes you're about to reissue as a boxed set?
Frank Zappa: In the case of the first four albums, the condition of the analog tapes was so dreadful you couldn't believe it. On the 2-track original mixes, the oxide had fallen off the tape and you could see through it. It was stored badly; the stuff was rancid. In some instances we had to go back to the original 8-track masters or 4-track masters or whatever we could find. Some of them weren't available. One of the 8-track masters (for a song called "Stuff Up the Cracks") from the Reuben and the Jets album is gone and no one knows where it is. All we could do was to re-equalize the 2-track mix for that song. Freak Out is re-EQed from the 2-track mix, as is Absolutely Free. But We're Only in It for the Money is remixed from the original masters with brand new digitally recorded drums and digitally recorded bass added. We took off the original mono drum set and put on classy drums and all that. We did the same thing on Reuben and the Jets. On Lumpy Gravy, we used a combination of the original 2-track masters plus newly overdubbed material. We have masses of EQ and Burwen-type devices. We have a thing called a Dynafex, and we use these 360 EQs along with those graphic equalizers down there.
Steve Birchall: Do you know about the new digital signal processors? Roger Lagadec at Studer has developed a very interesting one, and Tom Stockham at Soundstream had a program for upgrading old 78s to modern standards.

Frank Zappa: I didn't know about them at the time -- and they aren't really out on the market anyway. Also, I have a problem with the market for those tapes. I can only spend so much time and money to clean them up. Even so, I've spent quite a lot of studio hours putting together that album (the boxed set of Verve reissues). I probably have a month to six weeks of studio time in that first box. But if that machine could take the noise out of those Verve tapes...
Steve Birchall: I heard an amazing demonstration yesterday afternoon.
Frank Zappa: Oh, you mean the Caruso tapes? Well that's a real complicated deal. It's quite a trick removing an orchestra from a Caruso master.

Tripping on Art

Steve Birchall: One thing I wanted to ask you: Whatever happened to Art Tripp? Do you remember him?
Frank Zappa: The last time I heard, he was living in Pittsburgh. He came to one of our concerts in Pittsburgh, and he was an insurance salesman. Then he decided to play again, and he moved to California. I haven't seen him in years, but the last time I talked with him he was on his way to try out for a road band gig as a drummer for Donna Summers.
Steve Birchall: I know him when we were both in graduate school at the University of Cincinnati, and he ran off to play with your group. He played some of my pieces, and those were among the best performances of my music anyone has given me.
Frank Zappa: He's a great musician, no doubt about it. He was a little bit out of place in our band because he was so skilled. There were very few really skilled musicians in that group of early Mothers. Most of them were just rock 'n' roll guys and Art pretty much outclassed them. He definitely knew about things in the musical world that Jimmy Carl Black and Roy Estrada had never considered before. That was one of the charms of that old group. . .there was such a contrast in the personalities. Put a gut like Tripp up against a guy like Jimmy Carl Black, both playing drums at the same time, and you're talking about the war of the worlds. I even used to play drums in that band. I have some tapes of a couple of concerts at the Fillmore East where Art and I play drum duets. I would play on Jimmy Carl Black's set, and sometimes I would play on Art's set. Jimmy Carl Black would just keep time and I would rumble around.
Steve Birchall: How did it go over? Did people like it?
Frank Zappa: Well, did people like any of the stuff that band played during those days? Some of them did, some of them didn't. They all scratched their heads over it and wondered why it was happening on stage, and why we weren't telling them to get high while we played swirling psychedelic whirlpools of minor chords for people to go to sleep to in a purple haze. But there's really no percentage in doing that kind of a show anymore. You can't do it because there just aren't people who will listen. I notice how my kids listen to records, and they don't listen to the music. I mean, they hear it and then if they've seen the video, they already know what the thing's supposed to sound like. They make a snap decision about whether or not they like it, and the amount of involvement with the music as a composition is very small. It's like they're saying, "OK, I've consumed it. Quick -- where's the next thing?" It's all over, it's gone. I remember the records I used to listen to when I was in school. I played them till you could see through them. And I loved it just because it was music; I didn't care. But I don't see the same type of consumer patterns today. The material the kids are listening to is disposable. It has no content, and it really doesn't mean anything. So probably it's not worthwhile for them to sit and gyrate over it anyway. If they ever come in contact with any music that does have some depth, or something above and beyond the back beat on the Simmons snare and the hand claps and all that other cliched-to-death stuff, they won't know how to deal with it. It'll be dealt with the same as the disposable material. And adding to the misery of the whole thing is the idea of video music

as the approved modern way to consume music. It's not even music anymore -- you don't hear it, you see it. You can stand to look at it six times maybe before you've seen every cliche on the screen, and then it's useless.

The Screen Scene

Steve Birchall: Speaking of videos, what do you think about the possibility of distributing digital music on the cable TV systems?
Frank Zappa: Well, actually, I made a proposal and tried to raise some money to do that exact thing -- with a couple of extra wrinkles. I almost managed to do it, but the problem we came up against is the bit stream rate on the cable. It's too slow.
Steve Birchall: But if you can put it onto a VCR, why can't you put it through a cable channel?
Frank Zappa: It's a matter of quantity -- how much time. What are you going to do, just send it down the pike in real time?
Steve Birchall: Why not?
Frank Zappa: What I had proposed was a computerized data bank system. You could dial up a number to order a digital album, pay with your credit card, and you'd have it. Just plunk it onto your Sony PCM-F1 or whatever. The system would have to operate faster than real time, otherwise you just couldn't distribute enough music. But the facilities to do that don't exist. To send an album down a wire in real time is possible, but that means everybody has to listen to the same thing at the same time, so it's just like radio.
Steve Birchall: It gets to be a matter of scheduling, but it's a way of distributing music and charging people.
Frank Zappa: So you send something down the line digitally, and it gets played back on little tiny speakers in a little tiny room where they can't turn it up enough to have it do anything with the volume, and then what have you got? You just reduce the hiss for everyone. You still have to squash the bandwidth to get it through all of that stuff, so it's really kind of preposterous. See, if everybody in the country had a chance to listen to music on the monitor system we have in this studio, and could hear what things really are supposed to sound like, it would be a different story. But people get accustomed to what they hear it on -- and what they hear it on has been EQed to their taste. They turn the bass up, then turn the treble up, and it totally deforms anything that was originally on the record anyway.
Steve Birchall: True, but you have to give it a shot anyway.
Frank Zappa: Why? Teenagers have the answer: Everything goes all the way to the right -- all knobs -- all the way to the right. Otherwise they figure they're not getting quite enough mileage out of their system. I mean, you can't just leave those knobs alone.
Steve Birchall: You're not getting what you paid for unless you turn it up.
Frank Zappa: Right. You want to use as much electricity as you can. I like it when they put the loudness control on to boost the bass, then turn the bass up, and then turn the treble up. Oh boy! And then there are the people who will do that in conjunction with a DBX Disco Boom Box. I've actually used it on records. If you can control it, it's OK. Some people use them in concert on the bass.

Functional Disrepair

Steve Birchall: I had a malfunctioning DBX, a 122 noise reduction unit, and the effect I got out of it sounded so nice that I couldn't return it for repair until I finished the piece. I was just praying it wouldn't blow up before I finished. There's a short that develops between the compression and the expansion sides when a piece of dirt gets stuck in the switch. You get these enormous breathing and pumping effects with lots of hiss and sizzle.

Frank Zappa: You can do the same thing with a PDM, except it costs $7000. It's a gray box about this wide and about that high, made by Telefunken or EMT. They used to use them in disc cutting rooms. The compression, limiting, and expansion are all usable at the same time. And it's real bulbous. It's a stereo device, so it sets the overall stereo level and it just stays there, compensating for level from side to side.
Steve Birchall: Well, this was free. Just a little piece of dirt in the switch was all it took.
Frank Zappa: I like compressor when you can use them for effect and make them breathe, except for the hiss that comes up afterwards. It's one of the things I always liked about the PDM: You can make things sound really bulbous. We have those little antique compressors down there; ever seen those before? Those gray things on the bottom are EMT compressors. They're like mono versions of a PDM with the same bulbous characteristics, including a bass boost. We have some Scamp high range filters, low range filters, and de-essers. We also use Aphex compressors (they have a good expansions sound quality too). You learn to recognize what all the different flavors are, and eventually figure out the best place to apply them. There's a device that's been around since the Ice Age. I've always hated it, but now I've learned to like it. It's a very standard compressor, made by UREI: the 1176. I've always hated it, because I couldn't hear it. Because of the feed-through on those things, apparently they're faster than anything else that I have in the studio.
Steve Birchall: Is it variable?
Frank Zappa: No, and the compression ratio starts at 4-to-1. We use them instead of de-essers on some things that are a real problem because they'll can an "s" and do a good job on it without changing the tone quality. It's been a big help. On the Thing-Fish album, we did a lot of the dialogue, and that's always a problem.
Steve Birchall: But that guitar solo I heard on the tape you just played -- what unbelievable sounds.
Frank Zappa: That was from the new rock 'n' roll album Them or Us. I used two different solos from live concerts. One was from a concert in Stuttgart and the other was from a concert at the Ritz recorded two years later. The rest of the sounds were added in the studio. It's hard for me to play a solo in the studio, because there's nothing to inspire you. "While You Were Out," though, was done in the studio. It was just me and another guy sitting there playing against a drum track that was already recorded from another song. It can happen, but we rarely improvise in the studio. That's not one of my top priorities -- to sit around playing guitar into a tape recorder? Why? Who's going to listen to it?

Tools for Tunesmithing

The tone quality you heard on the guitar solos comes from the Dynaflanger. We had two different guitars with two different special EQ setups built into them. The first solo is on the Stratocaster that I normally use. It has an extremely high output that will cremate just about any amplifier. And it has two bands of parametric EQ that will increase the clipping and sustain to ridiculous levels. You can tune it to exactly the right feedback frequency on a run, so you can hold a note an it'll just lay there for a week.
The second solo, that one that was a little bit cleaner, was done on the Hendrix Strat before I had a problem with a loose circuit in it, so it's not so fuzzy. Both of those solos were processed through the Dynaflanger on a setting that examines the high-frequency decay and then triggers the effect from that. It makes that huffy, cheap kind of chewing gum sound. And the same effect was added to the bogus cello in the electronic version of "While You Were Out." I usually take those things out of the studio and put them in my guitar rack when I go on the road.
One thing that I have yet to do with it: I want to try to hook up the guitar and Dynaflanger with a pedal so I can control the output with my foot. Previously I've just been letting the

thing either follow the envelope or run off the internal oscillator. I think you could get a "wa-wa" sound out of it that could be very interesting. You could take a pair of them and hook them up to a pedal so they both could be swept the same way.

Musical Notes

Steve Birchall: How do you like the music printing capability of the Synclavier? I see some nice-looking printouts lying around here.
Frank Zappa: What that thing can do is amazing. I used to love to write music with paper and pencil. I used to carry manuscript paper in my briefcase and I'd write on airplanes; I'd write in airports; I'd write in motels when I was on the road; I'd just write music all the time.
Steve Birchall: I did too.
Frank Zappa: I stopped carrying it around.
Steve Birchall: I got sick of it. I wanted to have friends.
Frank Zappa: The time and work of doing that just aren't worth it. Why bother? It's stupid.
Steve Birchall: The whole concept became stupid, particularly since no one wanted to play the music after I finished writing it anyway.
Frank Zappa: Yes -- and if they did play it, nobody would want to listen to it. And if they did by chance listen to it, they wouldn't hear it. You're talking about the single most useless thing an American can do: Write music. Unless you're writing a song to be a hit record or writing a jingle for a product, there's no reason for anybody in America to write music. It's useless. It's literally without function in this society. People should just stop doing it -- and stop teaching it.
Steve Birchall: Charles Ives decided that long ago.
Frank Zappa: I know Varese stopped for about 25 years, but toward the end of his life he wrote again. But he was on the last fringes of when it was possible, maybe useful, to write music for the American public.
Steve Birchall: Yes. In those days, you could still get it performed.
Frank Zappa: Not accurately. You can't get an accurate performance out of an American orchestra. I don't think anybody in America has heard an accurate performance of anything except dead people's music in the last 50 years -- because there's no money for rehearsal.

Touring and Television

Steve Birchall: I was thinking as I was driving over here: I've heard your group in more places than anybody else I can think of. Maybe it's because I've made it a point to go hear you.
Frank Zappa: Probably, but a lot of other groups have toured more than us. I stopped for two years, but I got fed up with the world of serious music. I mean, I was stupid. I actually thought something was going on.
Steve Birchall: There isn't.
Frank Zappa: Everybody has to find out for themselves and I'm glad I found out before it was too late.
Steve Birchall: Have you made videos?
Frank Zappa: I made one. Just to show you how far we've come, rock 'n' roll on television used to be when Don Kirshner's cameraman would take a picture of the lights. Remember that? You get the shot of the lights, and the camera pulls back to show the group. We've come so far since that time that it's unbelievable. Science is wonderful the way it's made life so perfect. And that's where you should end the interview.

The Sin In Synclavier. Mutant Timbres, Stupid Guitar Controller Tricks, & Typing Through The Tuplets.

As Told To Dan Forte
From A Definitive Tribute to Frank Zappa (Best of Guitar Player, 1994)

Zappa's work with the Synclavier computer workstation was the focus of this June 1986 Guitar Player interview. -- Editor

Because of his orchestral inclinations, Frank Zappa would seem the perfect candidate for guitar synthesist. Indeed, he has experimented with nearly every system devised with the guitar in mind. But primarily because of his unorthodox left-hand techniques, no guitar controllers have completely suited his style. Instead, he has recently worked extensively with the Synclavier, using a keyboard typewriter to input data. His innovative sounds and rhythms using this system can be heard on the Barking Pumpkin LPs Them or Us, Thing Fish, Frank Zappa Meets the Mothers of Prevention, and Francesco Zappa, which features digital Synclavier orchestrations of the obscure eighteenth-century composer's works.

My history of working with guitar synthesizers goes back to a guitar-following device called the EWE, which stands for Electro Wagnerian Emancipator. There's only one of them; it was designed for me by Bob Easton at 360 Systems. If you played a single note, all 12 notes of the chromatic scale would be ringing, and you could make a decision as to which of those 12 to leave on and which to leave off -- and thereby select a chord that would follow parallel to whatever you played on the guitar. It worked; the only problem was the timbre of the synthesizer sound that came out was, I would say, fairly unattractive -- a real square wave sound. That is now gathering dust in the warehouse. I tried to use it on "Big Swifty" from Waka/Jawaka -- Hot Rats, but it didn't end up on the final track.

On "Be In My Video" [Them or Us], a couple of cuts from Thing Fish, and the entire Francesco Zappa album, I used the Synclavier with no sampling -- just the synthesizer sounds. The first time I used the polyphonic sampling was on Frank Zappa Meets the Mothers of Prevention; all of the material on side two, except for the little instrumental section with Thing Fish taking over it, was done with the machine. And on side one, "Yo Cats," which sounds like a little jazzbo lounge group, has real drums and Ike Willis' voice, but everything else is out of the Synclavier.

I recently tried out the Modulus Graphite controller, and it had problems similar to the guitar controllers I've played before -- it just felt better as a guitar. It seemed to be a better instrument than the Roland I tried out originally with the Synclavier. The difference is that the Modulus Graphite's neck is supposed to be more stable, and you're supposed to have better isolation, less false triggering, and so forth. There was less false triggering, but for the way I play, there was still too much. I've only tried the early Roland model they had with the Synclavier, and it just wasn't right for me. If it were, I'd have the thing up and running right now. I wouldn't dissuade somebody else from buying one -- apparently there are other people who can play it and make it do wonders -- but for the way I play the guitar, and for the uses I want it for, it just seemed wrong to buy it. Instead, I enter all the

data through the keyboard or the typewriter.

The Roland electronics won't read things like hammering on the string with a pick; it just chokes on that. The way in which I finger the instrument apparently is too slovenly for it to read. I don't mute every string after I play; there's no Berklee technique involved here -- I grab it and whack it. You can adjust the sensitivity within certain parameters, but if you adjust the sensitivity higher, that means it's going to pick up fewer nuances -- so where do you draw the line?

Depending on what data I'm entering, it can be inconvenient to have to do it all on keyboard or typewriter. For example, I can't just sit there and play a solo on the keyboard, because I don't think in those terms -- certainly not in real time, although I can slow the sequence down and play stuff and get some styling and phrasing. But the way in which the data is entered has a "drier" feel than if it had been played on the guitar. For one thing, on the guitar, you get to wiggle the intonation a little bit to make more subtle things happen. The tradeoff there, though, is that as you wiggle the strings and intonate it -- all that nuance stuff -- you generate masses and masses of numbers that fill your sequencer up very fast. That's certainly a liability because you can't do as many tracks of information. The bulk of the sequence is being filled up with inaudible data dealing with microtonal pitch adjustments. So a single line you might play of a minute-and-a-half duration, if you're using raw pitch, will fill up your sequence of 30,000 notes. Whereas if you type the pitches in, there's no dynamic or nuance pitch information entered that way. So you can have many more notes in your sequence and fill up all 16 tracks and still have space left over.

Allan Holdsworth came by the house with his SynthAxe, and that had some similar problems as well as some different ones, for me. One similarity is the string delay. The delay in the SynthAxe is caused by the MIDI delay, since the instrument doesn't have to count frequency like the Roland does. One set of strings tells you that the note has been initiated, and the other set tells you what the pitch is. It's insignificant delay on that end, but the MIDI delay is something I can feel. This doesn't bother some people, but for my ear and the way I want to use it, it just seemed inconvenient. Any time I can hear the sound of the pick and the after it the sound of whatever's supposed to come out, it bothers me. Even though it's just a few milliseconds apart, it makes me feel awkward.

I would have preferred it if the angle of the SynthAxe's neck had been adjustable by some sort of pivot. Everyone's body is different -- arm lengths are different; trunk lengths are different. The engineering principle is interesting and has a lot of merit, but it would be more useful if you could readjust the neck angle.

The main advantage for me with the Synclavier is that I can imagine rhythms that human beings have difficulty contemplating, let alone executing. When I'm writing for a live band, I'm constantly limited by the physical liabilities of the people who are going to play the parts. On the one hand, you can say, "You just keep practicing, be insistent, and you'll eventually get the rhythm." The truth of the matter is, the more you practice, the more the musician hates it; you're never really going to get it spot on if the person is suffering to play the rhythm. Why subject the musician to that punishment and torture when you can just type it in and get the thing mathematically exact? I'd say that a musical ideal would be a combination of the things live musicians do best and the things the machine does best blended into a type of composition that lets each element shine.

In terms of the sounds, the samples we use are mostly homemade. They're pure digital samples done in my studio. Often the factory samples originally start off on analog tape,

and sometimes you can play a sample up and down the keyboard and hear this residual, unwanted, blurry gunk traveling with it. In the case of the drum set, we recorded each drum and cymbal in isolation, so that there's no residual hardware ring from other objects on the drum set. And we recorded each drum in stereo -- the snare, the kick drum, each tom, everything. The net result when you put this together into a patch and play it back on the keyboard is something surrealistically clean and perfect. I also have samples of lots of different types of guitars -- a really nice classical guitar, several steel-string guitars done with the pick and with fingers all in stereo, both ambient and close-up recording. I've got tenor sax done with full-length, eight-second tones, with natural vibrato, in stereo, with the Ben Webster "flaw attack" [laughs] -- a really unctuous tenor sax sound. We also have samples of whole orchestral chords, from the London Symphony Orchestra -- Zappa album. The LSO album was done on a 24-track digital multitrack, so you can single out string, brass, or wind sections to get really high-quality, isolated digital specimens.

For the sounds that don't resemble any other instruments, we have a whole classification of noises: one being the Evolver, where a sound starts off to be one type of an instrument, and by the time the note is finished, it's been turned into maybe two or three other instruments, all with a smooth transition. Then we have Resolvers, where different types of resynthesized vocal or instrumental timbres are located on each of the four partials, and by depressing a single key on the keyboard, you get a four-note chord that is actually four independent melody lines that resolve against each other to a final payoff. Then if you depress the key at the end of the payoff, you get a bonus of another bent. So you can have little melismas, little eight-note melodies, that occur, and all you do is push the key down, and it sings some kind of Renaissance cadence or whatever. Two of the partials could be resynthesized voices, one could be a resynthesized violin, and the other a resynthesized bassoon. Instant Renaissance ensemble when you hit each key. So you imagine what happens when you play a chord [laughs] -- it gets very absurd. It enables you to write things that you couldn't deal with under any other circumstance.

An example of one of the "impossible" things I've done is: While one instrument is keeping a steady pulse at 120, another instrument is doing a ritard, where each successive note is five milliseconds later than the note before, over a period of time. There's no accurate way to notate that, but it has an interesting feel to it because it slows down so gradually and so mathematically. You can do things like that within a bar -- little accelerandos and ritardandos in five-millisecond increments inside of one bar.

Eventually, everything goes to tape because that's how the album is manufactured, but prior to that you can do all sorts of things; there's no question that that's a big advantage. Most of the editing I do after the basic composition is entered is done on what Synclavier calls the "G Page," which shows you three tracks, each with three columns of information. One column tells you the start time, another tells you the pitch, and another tells you the duration. Once you learn how to read that, you can edit on that page very fast, and you still have access to playing things on the keyboard while you're doing your editing -- which you don't have when you're editing in the music-printing function. The keyboard is disabled when you're dealing with that; you have to do it either on the screen or in your head, or keep bouncing back and forth. If you it on the G Page, you don't actually see any notes or staff or anything -- you see numbers that represent in fractions where the beat is located in the bar.

When you're typing in the music printing section, there's a process called tupletization. It's not a real word, but it's an accurate description of what the machine does. You push a button, and then it says "tuplet." Then it asks you what kind of a tuplet you want. You give

it a flavor, like 11. Then you tell the machine 11 over how many beats -- for instance, 11 over 3. Let's say it's all in 4/4: You type in tuplet 11 over 3 beats, and hit Return. The screen redraws, and now the first three beats of a 4/4 bar have been restructures. The way you deal with entering information in the music printing is, each bar of music is divided into what they call "edit blocks." For example, if you're in 4/4 and choose edit resolution 32, every time you move the cursor one degree to the right, you're moving it one 32nd-note edit block to the right. So in 4/4 with edit resolution 32, there are 32 edit blocks in the bar. If you do this tuplet thing that I just described, there are now probably 44 edit blocks over the first three beats. If you want to enter an 11-tuplet in there, you just give a couple of commands and it locates pitches inside this imaginary framework of an 11-tuplet over 3. And you're not limited to just entering 11 notes; you could enter four 32nd-notes for each eighth-note in the 11-tuplet, if you wanted, thereby winding up with a 44-tuplet. Also, if you decided that right in the middle of your 11-tuplet you wanted to have a quintuplet that began on the third note of the 11-tuplet, you give a second instruction and it gives you a second-level tuplet. We're building what is described as a nested polyrhythm -- one polyrhythm living inside of another polyrhythm. With this machine you can nest three of them. After you've entered your quintuplet starting on the third beat of the 11-tuplet, you could then decide you wanted to have a septuplet that began on the second beat of the quintuplet inside of the 11-tuplet. Or any kind of tuplet you wanted, up to the maximum resolution of the machine. After you've typed in all the stuff, you push the Play button, and by golly, there it comes -- and it's on time.

If you really want to get abstract and build your composition just on the G Page, instead of dealing with tuplets, you can deal in milliseconds. The rhythm on the G Page is determined by the start time of the note -- that's the data that lives in the left-hand column. So you can read data on the G Page in three different modes: in terms of seconds, beats, or SMPTE [time code] numbers. If you're looking at a 4/4 bar at 120 in the mode that shows you beats per bar, beat 1 is the first quarter-note, beat 2 is the second quarter-note, etc., and beat 5 is the downbeat of the next bar. But inside of that, you have resolution down to five milliseconds. You can add and delete notes on the G Page. So you can build a list that would say: There's a note on beat 1 and there's another note on beat 1.005. Then the next one could be on any arbitrary number -- you can just enter any kind of numerical scheme you want for the rhythm. For some of the kinds of rhythms I type in, my G Page tuplets look like beat 1, beat 1.07, beat 1.14 -- in other words, this whole series of notes is going to be 70 milliseconds apart. You don't even need to worry about tuplets anymore -- just go for the flow. You can have these notes be totally distinct from one another, or you can have them overlapping each other to make chordal arpeggios, just by changing the duration in the far right-hand column. In other words, if you want the notes to overlap -- if they are 70 units apart, and you want every three of them to overlap -- on the page it would look like the third note would last 70 units, the second note would last 140, and the first would last 210. The first note that plays would last the longest. The effect is like a little three-note arpeggio. That's what I do for 12 and 14 hours a day -- sit there and deal with those kinds of numbers. It is the only way to write that kind of music.

MIDI needs to be faster, because if I'm writing in those small increments of time just for the rhythm, with the types of delays that are built into using MIDI to hook things together -- it gets a little tedious when things [i.e., synth modules] talk late.

With any of the systems that are pitch-to-voltage, before the voltage counter can figure out what frequency the string is vibrating at, it has to wait until the decay of the blast of white noise that occurs when the pick hits the string goes away completely. There's no way around that that I know of. The problem with fret-switching is that it's taking us all the

way back to the Guitorgan. If the fret-switching is going to tell you what the pitch is, then you've kind of got what's happening in the SynthAxe.

Frank Zappa

in PROGRESSIVE MAGAZINE
November 1986

This is the same interview as that of the Option Magazine but with some new things at the end, as it was first published at Progressive Magazine.

Zappa on Art in America

Lyons / Friedman: In the past you have said that "art is dying in this country." What do you mean by this?

Frank Zappa: Much of the creative work I find interesting and amusing has no basis in economic reality. Most decisions relevant to expenditures for what gets produced and distributed are made strictly on a bottom line basis. Nobody makes a move without talking to their accountant first. There will always be people who will take a chance, but their numbers are dwindling. Those who are crazy enough to take the chance on spending money to make some unusual object or event take place are an endangered species. The spirit of adventurousness at any level of American society has been pretty much legislated away. In the eighties, with a repressive Republican, yuppie-oriented administration installed and ready to perpetuate itself with Supreme Court appointments that will keep us in trouble for the next half century, the prognosis is not good for things which differ from the viewpoint of the conservative right.

Lyons / Friedman: Do you think anything can be done to reverse the trend?

Frank Zappa: Perhaps. I tend to view the whole thing as a conspiracy. It is no accident that the public schools in the United States are pure shit. It is no accident that masses of drugs are available and openly used at all levels of society. In a way, the real business of government is the business of controlling the labor force. Social pressure is placed on people to become a certain type of individual, and then rewards are heaped on people who conform to that stereotype. Take the pop music business, for example. Look at the stereotypes held up by the media as great accomplishment. You see guys who are making millions of dollars and selling millions of units. And because they are making and selling millions they are stamped with the seal of approval, and it is the millions which make their work quality. Yet anyone can look at what is being done and say, "Jesus, I can do that!" You celebrate mediocrity, you get mediocrity. People who could have achieved more won't, because they know that all they have to do is be "that" and they too can sell millions and make millions and have people love them because they're merely mediocre. Few people who do anything excellent are ever heard of. You know why? Because excellence, pure excellence, terrifies the fuck out of Americans because they have been bred to appreciate the success of the mediocre. People don't like to be reminded that lurking somewhere there are people who can do some shit that you can't do. They can think a

way you can't think, they can dance a way you can't dance. They are excellent. You aren't excellent. Most Americans aren't excellent, they're only OK. And so to keep them happy as a labor force, you say, "OK, let's take this mediocre chump," and we say, "He is terrific!" All the other mediocre chumps say, "Yeah, that's right and that gives me hope, because one day as mediocre and chumpish as I am I can..." It's smart labor relations. An MBA decision. That is the orientation of most entertainment, politics, and religion. So considering how firmly entrenched all that is right now, you think it's going to turn around? Not without a genetic mutation it's not!

Lyons / Friedman: If you would focus on the message of pop music for a moment, what do you see as the issues of the 1980's that music can address today?

Frank Zappa: It can address anything it wants to, but it will only address those topics that will sell. Musicians will not address topics that are controversial if they want to have a hit. So music will continue to address those things that really matter to people who buy records: boy-girl relationships, boy-boy relationships, boy-car relationships, girl-car relationships, boy-girl-food relationships, perhaps. But safe. Every once in a while somebody will say "War is Hell" or "Save the Whales" or something bland. But if you talk about pop music as a medium for expressing social attitudes, the medium expresses the social attitude perfectly by avoiding contact with things that are really there. That is the telling point about the society that is consuming the product. If society wanted to hear information of a specific nature in songs, about controversial topics, they would buy them. But they don't. You are talking about a record- buying audience which is interested in their personal health and well-being, their ability to earn a living, their ability to stay young at all costs forever, and not much else.

Lyons / Friedman: How about the role of music in society outside the pop music industry? For example, Kent Nagano (conductor of the Berkeley symphony) said in a recent interview that "a composer has a job to do within a culture. Which is not to say a composer should write what the public already wants to hear, but rather that the public is employing the composer to lead them, to show them a direction." What do you think of that?

Frank Zappa: I don't think a composer has any function in society at all, especially in an industrial society, unless it is writing music scores, advertising jingles, or stuff that is consumed by industry. I respect Kent, however I think he takes a very optimistic and naive attitude toward what it takes to be a composer. If you walk down the street and ask anybody if a composer is of any use to any society, what kind of answer do you think you would get? I mean, nobody gives a shit. If you decide to become a composer, you seriously run the risk of becoming less than a human being. Who the fuck needs you? A songwriter is different. [in a facetious sing-song voice] You write a nice song, then you're important. Because with a song, now we have a car, now we have love, now we have a this ... but a composer? What the fuck do they do? All the good music's already been written by people with wigs and stuff on.

Lyons / Friedman: So the public doesn't need composers. What about composers? Do they need a public? For example [electronic music composer] Milton Babbit, in an essay titled "Who cares if you listen?" has advocated the virtual exclusion of the general public from modern music concerts. What is your opinion on that ?

Frank Zappa: That's unnecessary, they're already excluded; they don't go! Have you been to a modern music concert? Plenty of room, isn't there? Come on Milton, give yourself a break. I hope you're not going to spend money trying to exclude these people. What are

you going to do, have it legislated in Congress, like those assholes who wanted to make it a law that you couldn't put anything backwards on a phonograph record?

Lyons / Friedman: So, given all this, what do you think art will be like 20 years from now?

Frank Zappa: Since I'm not in that business, it's hard for me to really care. [Author's note: Zappa does not think that his work is perceived as art.] I can lament its passing. I don't think anything that a reasonable person would describe as art will be around. Not here. I'm talking about art in terms of valued, beautiful stuff that
is done not because of your ego but just because it is beautiful, just because it is the right thing to do. We will be told what is good and it will be mediocre. There's always a possibility that an anomaly will appear - some weird little twisted thing will happen and there will be somebody who's doing it. But who's going to know?
In the dark ages there was art, but who knew?

Zappa on The Music Industry

Lyons / Friedman: How do unknown groups attract the attention of record companies?

Frank Zappa: Today record companies don't even listen to your tape. They look at you publicity photo. They look at your hair. They look at your zippers. How gay do you look? And if you've got the look then it really doesn't make a fucking bit of difference what's on the tape - they can always hire somebody to fix that. And they don't expect you to be around for 20 years. The business is not interested in developing artists. They want that fast buck because they realize that next week there's going to be another hairdo and another zipper. And they realize that the people are not listening, they're dancing, or they're driving, or something else. The business is more geared to expendability today. That's because merchandising is so tied to "visuals" now.

Lyons / Friedman: How is music selected to be heard on pop radio? Is it determined by the taste of the listener or does the public listen to whatever the industry feeds them?

Frank Zappa: A little of both. Radio is consumed like wallpaper is consumed. You don't concentrate on the radio, you turn it on while you're working, you turn it on while you're driving. It's not like the old days when families sat around and looked at it. So the stations are formatted to provide a certain texture and ambience
that will be consumed by people who view themselves in a certain way. Are you a yuppie? Well, you're going to listen to a certain texture because that reinforces the viewpoint you want to project to other people of who and what you are. It's the same thing as what you leave on your coffee table for people to discover when they come to your apartment. It's not a musical medium, it's an advertising medium. So if you have a nation of people who refuse to face reality about themselves, about the rest of the world, about anything, they want reinforcement for the fantasy that they're living in. And these consulting services that format the station know that. Market research will show that. So obviously you want to deliver to the public things that will reinforce that. A station loses money when somebody turns it off like the air. So as long as your station sounds like the kind of swill that the yuppie needs to consume, you got it.

Lyons / Friedman: Could you give us your view of the process whereby a record becomes a hit?

Frank Zappa: It's simple. It's called "payola". You pay somebody to play your record. Hits are OK. I think they're wonderful for people who like to listen to them. But then, hits shouldn't be the sum total of music history. Let's face it. Mozart had hits. Beethoven had hits. Did you ever look in the Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians? There are thousands of names of people who wrote music throughout history, yet we haven't heard one line they ever wrote. That doesn't mean it is bad music. It just means they didn't have hits. In the old days, if the king didn't like you, or the church didn't like you or whatever,you didn't have a hit. As a matter of fact you might even be dead. So now you can have a hit if you are willing to pay. So who's the new king. Who's the new church?

Zappa on His Music

Lyons / Friedman: As you compose, are you primarily guided by how you want the music to affect a listener's spiritual, emotional, intellectual or physical state, or by the musical structure - melody, harmony, and rhythm?

Frank Zappa: None of the above. It's more like, how did it turn out? Does it work? And if it works you don't even have to know why it works. It either works or it doesn't. Its like drawing a picture. Maybe there are too many fingers on one hand, and a foot is too short over there. Or you could apply it to the design of a building. Did you forget to put in a toilet, or are there enough windows on the second floor?

Lyons / Friedman: Those are examples of pragmatic considerations as opposed to aesthetic considerations.

Frank Zappa: I don't know how to explain it. I just do it. It's not based on any academic regulations. If you take a blank piece of paper and pencil and just start sketching, it doesn't necessarily have to be a house and a tree and a cow. It could just be some kind of scribble, but sometimes those scribbles work and they are the right thing for that blank piece of space and you can enjoy them Or you can say, "That's not a house, that's not a cow, that's not a tree, and so I don't like it; it's just a scribble." It depends on what your viewpoint is.

Lyons / Friedman: Is your view truly as subjective as you are painting it to be? So, if I look at an image and it appeals to me, then all I can say is that it works for me and I can't say any more about it?

Frank Zappa: What else do you have the right to say? If you go beyond that, you become a critic. Who needs those fuckers?

Lyons / Friedman: Other people might say that there's something universal, some sort of consensus on what works and what doesn't.

Frank Zappa: People are free to agree. If you want to join a committee to feel the warmth and reassurance of other people's opinions to reinforce your own, then go for it. I happen to not care for that. It's not something that I aspire to, nor do I want to live my life in accordance with that ideal. In fact, I despise it. But it's okay for other people. There's no reason why I should inflict my point of view on somebody who enjoys being part of a group consensus.

Lyons / Friedman: What are the relative merits of various human pursuits? For example, do you consider jogging or playing ice hockey to be of equal value to say creating art, on some cosmic scale?

Frank Zappa: No.

Lyons / Friedman: Why? What is the scale?

Frank Zappa: What is it that survives from ancient civilizations that characterizes that civilization? What do you find? Not their jogging! The music doesn't survive, but things that are related to art do. The beautiful things that the societies do is what survives. Let's look into the future. Let's look at the remnants of the American society . . .

Lyons / Friedman: Wait a second, ugly things survive too.

Frank Zappa: Yep. That's what will survive the American society!

Lyons / Friedman: You seem to admire the raw emotional energy of some music, yet you have little tolerance for emotional love songs.

Frank Zappa: It's quite a challenge to reach somebody emotionally without using words that have literal connections. To perform expressively on an instrument, I have respect for that. To get to the level of performance where you are no longer thinking about operating a piece of machinery, that is worthy of respect. Writing a song about why somebody left you, that's stupid. The performers and composers don't necessarily believe in what they're saying or what they are doing, but they know that if you write a song about love, it's got a 3,000 per cent better chance of going on the radio than if you write a song about celery. It's a buy and a sell. And so the value system builds up from that. What I think of as the emotional content of music is probably a lot different than what you think of. Since I write music, I know what the techniques are. If I wanted to write something that would make you weep, I could do it. There's ways to do it. It's a cheap shot.

Lyons / Friedman: Would you say it's sentimental?

Frank Zappa: It's not just sentimental. There are certain harmonic climates that you can build. There are certain notes of the scale that you can play within a harmonic climate to "wreak pathos," and it's very predictable. The average guy doesn't know how predictable or easy it is to do that stuff. For example, you've got the key; it's A minor right? And you're going to play a lot of Bs in the key of A minor and that's going to give you that little twinge. Well, that music played on an accordion is not the same as the exact same notes and the same melody and same rhythm played on six bagpipes. It's a different story. So the timbre is involved too. And the amplitude is involved. If that A-minor chord is very quiet and the Bs are just smoothly put in there, that's one attitude. If it's being played by a high school marching band and it's being jammed in your face, it's sad all right, but it's not that kind of sad! In different cultures there are also different norms for how certain sounds are perceived. That's why if you listen to Chinese classical music, everything sounds like it's being played on a kazoo and it's thin and weird, but to a Chinese person, it's lush. I don't know why a person would think that the tone quality of Chinese classical music was really a warm sensation. The Chinese are different though. They've got 7,000 years behind them. Maybe after 7,000 years we're going to think that stuff sounds pretty good too.

Lyons / Friedman: What do you see as your greatest accomplishment and your greatest failure?

Frank Zappa: I would say my entire life has been one massive failure. Because I don't have the tools or wherewithal to accomplish what I want to accomplish. If you have an idea, and you want that idea to be done a certain way and you can't do it, what do you have? You have failure. I live with failure every day because I can't do the things that I really want to do. I can do some other stuff. I can do whatever my budget will allow me to do. Unfortunately, I have these ideas that are just too
fucking expensive. In realistic terms you're looking at a genuine daily failure syndrome. I have no fantasies about what the odds are that I'll be able to do what I want to do. It's not going to happen. Once you realize what your limitations are and realize that even if you "achieve" something it doesn't make a fucking bit of difference anyway, then you can be "okay." I enjoy sitting down here [in the home studio] all by myself typing on the Synclavier. I can do twelve hours and love it. And I know that ultimately it doesn't mean a fucking thing that I did it. It's useless. That's okay, it makes me feel good.

Lyons / Friedman: It seems that for most people that kind of isolation would lead to loneliness.

Frank Zappa: Try to imagine what the opposite of loneliness is. Think of it. Everyone in the world loves you? What is that? Realize you are in isolation. Live it! Enjoy it! Just be glad that there aren't a bunch of people who want to use up your time. Because along with all the love and admiration that's going to come from the people that would keep you from being lonely, there is the emotional freight you have to bear from people who are wasting your time, and you can't get that back. So when you're lonely and all by yourself, guess what you have? You have all your own time. That's a pretty good fucking deal. Something you couldn't buy any place else. And every time you're out being sociable and having other people be "nice" to you so you don't feel "lonely," they are wasting your time. What do you get for it? Because after they're done being nice to you they want something from you. And they've already taken your time! Loneliness, once you've come to deal with it so it is not an uncomfortable sensation, so it doesn't feel like drowning or something, is not a bad deal. It's a good deal. It's the next best thing to solitude. I'm not talking solitary confinement. Solitude. If you're sensitive to loneliness, you're going to be in trouble, because then the loneliness turns into something really painful, a horrible depression and then you die. One way or another, you just die. So who needs that shit?

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http://www.geocities.com/zerttrez/phase2/77guitar.htm
http://wiki.killuglyradio.com/wiki/Frank_Zappa_On..._The_%2780s_Guitar_Clone

"Good Guitar Stuff" or "Stereotypifications"? The Evolution of The Guitar's Use In Pop Music: Brief Version

As told to Dan Forte
Guitar Player, 1987 January

Who better to comment on the guitar's evolution in pop music than Frank Zappa? That's what we asked ourselves in late 1976, when we were preparing our 10th Anniversary issue of Guitar Player (Jan. '77). And when the question came up again for our 20th Anniversary, the answer was the same. Besides being one of rock's most prolific composers and recording artists – both as a soloist and head of the Mothers Of Invention – Zappa is one of the idiom's finest, albeit underrated, guitarists, a synthesizer pioneer, and an intelligent, biting satirist. In recent years he has concentrated on his first love, modern classical composition, and has been one of the country's most outspoken opponents to the PMRC's drive to give ratings to rock lyrics.
His essay of 10 years ago, **"Good Guitar Stuff or Stereotypifications? The Evolution Of The Guitar's Use In Pop Music: Short Version,"** was so provocative, so priceless, so ... Zappa that we decided to rerun it in its entirety – at the end of which Frank reflects on what he wrote before, with comments about the state of guitar in the '80s. Also in this issue, an added bonus: a Soundpage recording of Frank's onstage debut with son Dweezil, playing "Sharleena "(see page 82).

> During the '50s it was rare to find a guitar solo on rock or R&B singles – it was usually the honk-squeak tenor sax syndrome taking up the space between the bridge and the third verse. When a guitar was heard (usually on the blues or country blues items I was collecting), its function bore little resemblance to today's collection of pathetic lick-spewage and freeze-dried stereotypifications. (All of you sensitive guitar fans who actually get off on our current pseudo-academic era of polished efficiency had better read another article.)
> If you have access to them, take the time to listen to the guitar solos on *"Three Hours Past Midnight"* (Johnny Guitar Watson), *"The Story Of My Life"* (Guitar Slim), or just about any of B. B. King's singles from that period. For my taste, these solos are exemplary because what is being played seems honest and, in a musical way, a direct extension of the personality of the men who played them. If I were a music critic, I would have to say that these values for me mean more than the ability to execute clean lines or clouds of educated gnat-notes.
> Other examples of good guitar stuff from that era might include *"Lucy Mae Blues"* (Frankie Lee Simms), *"Happy Home"* (Elmore James – even though Elmore tended to play the same famous lick on every record, I got the feeling that he meant it), and the work of Hubert Sumlin (and Buddy Guy a couple of times) on Howlin' Wolf's things. I'm sure there are other hot items, but this is a short article.
> Also, to be fair about it, there were some classic examples of sterility then, too, in the kind of rock solos on the Bill Haley singles and the obnoxious kleen-teen finger work on the New York-based R&B vocal quintet records (on labels like Gee, on the up-tempo

numbers with the ice-cream-cone chord changes).
Then we get to the '60s. We get there partly because R&B was being produced to death (strings on Ray Charles and Fats Domino records, etc.) and because England was starting to ship back some recycled '50s music, played by people who were younger and cuter than the original performers, to be consumed by people who were younger and cuter than the original consumers (and who, especially in the case of Rolling Stones fans, had never heard the original recordings of their revamped Slim Harpo / Muddy Waters repertoire ... and not only that, folks; if they *had* heard the originals, they probably wouldn't have liked them at all, since neither of the original artists named above were as prance-worthy as Mick Jagger).
Obviously, part of the recycling process included the imitation of Chuck Berry guitar solos, B. B. King guitar solos, and even some abstractions of John Lee Hooker guitar solos. The guitar was becoming more prevalent in backing arrangements on singles, especially as a rhythm instrument. Solos on most white-person records of that day and age tended to be rhythmic also, especially in surf music. Almost everything that survives in popular memory (the greatest hits, in other words) was designed for the purpose of dancing – but mainly just to sell. The '60s saw the beginnings of record production as a science in the service of commerce, with heavy emphasis on the repetition of successful formulas. The best that can be said about this period is that it brought us Jeff Beck at his feedback apex, Jimi Hendrix at this overkill-volume best, and Cream, which sort of legitimized jamming a lot onstage (so long as you could prove British descent, usually by reeling off musical quotations from blues records which most Americans had never heard. [Radio programming nerds made sure you never heard any of that stuff because Negroes were playing it, and they did their best to protect the young audiences of the '50s and early '60s from such a horrible culture shock, while over in England the better musicians were lusting after vintage blues records, actually obtaining them, and having these records form the basis of their playing traditions]).
So briefly to review: I would characterize guitarism of the '50s as having, in *its* best cases, some real humor, style, and personality, and, in its worst cases, mechanical sterility and lack of musical interest.
I would characterize the '60s as having, at its best, exploratory qualities not possible before the advent of heavy amplification and recording studio machinery; more rhythmic interest; and, in some instances, real humor, style, and personality. At its worst, the guitarism of the '60s brought us amateur strummery; several swift kicks at the Fender Twin Reverb springs; the archetype of folk-rock 12-string swill (the predecessor of the horrible fake-sensitivity music we have today with the laid-back sensitive-type artist / singer / songwriter / suffering person, posed against a wooden fence provided by the Warner Bros. Records art department, graciously rented to all the other record companies who needed it for their version of the same crap); and the first examples of the "psychedelic guitar solo," not to mention *Inna-Gadda-Da-Vida-ism.*
Obviously, this is condensing and leaving out a lot, but I'm sure that all of you entirely-too-modern persons who have read this far are getting anxious for something more relevant to your lifestyle – and you're probably right! A perspective of musical history has absolutely no place in today's thrilling musical world. Yes, that's right, you heard right!
How could any of this information be useful to a musical world that has reached a point of sophistication that accepts concepts like The Super-Group, The Best Guitar Player In The World, The Fastest Guitar Player In The World, The Prettiest Guitar Player In The World, The Loudest Guitar Player In The World, The Guitar Player In The World Who Has Collected The Most Oldest Guitars In The World (some of which have been played by dead guitar players who were actually musicians), and so forth?
The history of Pop Music has a habit of telling us who we really are – 'cause if we

weren't that way, we wouldn't have spent billions of dollars on those records, would we? After careful training by media and merchandising people, the entire population (even guitar players) has been transmuted into a reasonably well-groomed, odor-free, *consumer-amoeba* that is kept alive only to service manufacturers and lives its life by the motto: biggest, fastest, loudest is most and best.

So forget about the past; it means nothing to you now (unless you can find a way to play it louder / faster – which probably wouldn't be too hard since even infants today can play as fast as the earliest Mahavishnuisms). Let's face it, once you learn the 28 or 29 most commonly used rock guitar doodads (a few country licks, a little Albert King, a pentatonic scale here 'n' there, get yer heavy vibrato together), you are ready to live; to be what will be known in the future as "The Guitar Player Of The'70s." Yes, soon you will belong to the ages, and when you've finally got your album contract, and it finally comes out, and it sells 10,000,000 copies, and when every beginning guitar player sits at home and hears you wanking away at phenomenal speed with your perfect fuzz and your thoroughly acceptable execution, and when that little guy with his first guitar (him and the 10,000,000 other ones) says to himself: "Shit, I can do that," and proceeds to memorize every awe-inspiring note, and then plays it faster than you ... (maybe gets his thirty-second-notes up around a dotted whole-note = 208). And not only that; after learning your solo faster, he transposes it up a minor third, steals some of his mother's clothes, gets a job in a bar, gets discovered, gets a record contract (with an advance 10 times bigger than yours), makes an album (with a better budget than yours because he's going to be the next big thing, according to the executives at the record company, and they don't mind spending a little extra for real talent). And not only that; while you just figured out you can't play any faster because you haven't had any time to practice because you got coked out on the royalties of your first album (and you still have to record 10 more according to your contract), and it's time to do your second album, and you've been asking recording engineers how a VSO works, meanwhile the little guy with his mother's clothes on gets his album out on the street, and it sells 20,000,000 copies, and somewhere out there, there's 20,000,000 other little guys with their first guitars, and they're listening to your recycled wank, and they're saying ...

Two syndromes that didn't exist when you wrote your 1977 essay are: MTV and the guitar synths of today, with MIDI guitar and sampling. In light of these, do you see the '80s guitarist being significantly different from the 70s guitarist?

Well, the one thing that seems to be more prevalent today is imitation. I think that the amount of copycat players in the marketplace today is significantly higher than it's ever been before. You see very few truly original guitarists and a whole bunch of people who wish they were Eddie Van Halen. The aesthetic norm for guitar playing viewed as an ongoing trend seems to be: If Eddie can do it, why, I can certainly do it, and maybe if I practice, I can do it faster. That seems to be the motivating aesthetic for most of the guitar players who get recorded today. There may be creative ones working out there someplace who never got to make a record, but it seems that the two criteria for getting on a record today are: What do you look like – that's first – and second, how many of Eddie's licks can you play? And if you don't exactly play his licks, you'd better be playing two-handed guitar on the neck; otherwise, you sound like an old-fashioned sort of a person. You just couldn't possibly make it today.

You've had a lot nice things to say about Van Halen himself, but when it comes to just the pretenders to the throne, do you feel they're missing the essence of what makes him great and are concentrating too much on sheer gymnastics?

I think the bottom line is the gymnastic aspect of it.

What was it about Eddie Van Halen's guitar playing that made you appreciate him more than the rest of the crowd?

Well, I didn't see anybody else doing the technique that he was doing. He just had it under control so much, it didn't sound forced. It wasn't like, "Watch me throw this thing in here now." It sounded like it belonged.

What about your experiences with guitar synths and the Synclavier, which have resulted in your not playing as much guitar?

I probably would be playing more guitar right now if I were more comfortable with the Synclavier guitar interface. I've tried it a number of times in different stages of development, and this is not just to pick on them – I've tried all other kinds of guitar interfaces to plug into that machine – and none of them feel comfortable to use. So most of the data that's entered into the machine is entered through the keyboard or it's typed in or it's played in with a Roland Octapad. If something ever comes along that will allow me to generate the kind of music that I want to generate on the Synclavier but started off from a guitar-based concept, then I might pick it up. But it just seems like a real roundabout way to enter the data for me right now. Very little of what I'm writing on the thing has anything to do with guitar styles. I'm using samples of classical guitar, but there is nothing in these compositions that sounds like guitar playing.

Because of the nature of how you input it, would the music be impossible to play on a guitar?

Well, what I like to do is, if I have access to a machine that will do impossible things, I want to make sure that the composition that results from the use of the machine contains at least a few of the impossibilities. In the case of whether it could be played on a guitar, one of the reasons that the answer would be "no" is because you can actually have pitches coming out of the instrument that don't exist on a guitar, both higher and lower, and also intervallic jumps that would be physically impossible to do on a guitar and runs going by at speeds that would be impossible to do on a guitar.

You've also been very outspoken on the ethics of sampling a record or a recorded sound?

I don't think that it's right to do it. I mean, if you do it with permission, fine, but I've put on all my records a little notice that says "Unauthorized sampling prohibited. "I think that people who go around sampling CDs really shouldn't do it.

In numerous interviews, you've cited the same guitarists you mentioned in your essay as the players who really moved you – Johnny Guitar Watson, Elmore James, Guitar Slim, early B. B. King ...

Well, you'd have to include Wes Montgomery and Allan Holdsworth in there, too, I'm afraid.

Allan Holdsworth seems like a far cry from Guitar Slim.

When I listen to music, I listen to what the substance is, not necessarily the style of it. I've heard bluegrass players that knock me out, too.

Do you think the types of music that touch you are still "a direct extension of a personality of the men who played them."

Well, I get the same sensation listening to Wes Montgomery. You hear Wes when you hear him play, and the same thing with Holdsworth. He puts his personality, something about him as a person, into playing, and I don't detect "watch me show off now" – there is none of that syndrome. That's the thing that is most obnoxious about current guitar, because when people are attempting to play the guitar in a competitive way, in order to do somebody else's style but just do it faster, that's great from an Olympic competition kind of a standpoint, but I don't think it's particularly musical. And since I like music, it would not necessarily excite me to hear someone playing something real fast, if it wasn't unique to the individual.

Have you been influenced at all by the taste and the playing of your kids?

No, because at the point when Dweezil started playing the guitar when he was 12, his first idol before Eddie was actually Randy Rhoads, and I wasn't very familiar with Randy's

playing. But if I play the guitar, I certainly do not play it in order to amuse Dweezil. And since I haven't touched it in a couple of years, I guess I don't play it to amuse anybody.

Have the recent trends in guitar served to reinforce what you've always felt about those players?

There is no substitute for that. There just isn't. You have to remember, whatever I say about contemporary music is based on the quantity that I actually get a chance to listen to. Since I don't collect records of that nature and I don't go out to concerts of that kind of stuff, my experience is whatever happens to be on the radio in the car before I tell the person driving to turn it off, or what I will see on MTV flipping through the dial. I'm not an aficionado of any of it. I have to talk in general terms; I can't give you specifics without the technique of guitar player so-and-so with such-and-such a group. With kind of minimal exposure to it, I don't think that I'm too far off the mark in talking about the redundancy and the derivitiveness of most of the guitar work that appears in the rock videos. There is another exceptional guitar player, one of the guys that Dweezil really admires, and that's Warren DiMartini from *Ratt.* I've seen him play, and I think that he's excellent, too. I think he's got his own thing going.

In the same way that Olympic records are always being broken, guitar playing seems to be getting faster and faster.

Not only is it getting faster, but the solos themselves are becoming gymnastic routines – basically 8- and maybe 16-bar gymnastic routines that are stuck in the middle of songs about fairly common topics. The whole concept of extended improvisations that are compositions in progress is something that is pretty much gone from the pop music scene. That's one of the major losses for the '80s, I think. That's what I was addressing in the old article, talking about the process by which the kid sitting at home listens to a tape, and although he couldn't read it off the piece of paper, learns it by rote like a parrot, and winds up playing faster and faster and faster. I think that's really what's taking place.

Do you think because of the climate that exists today, as far as mass-programming of radio and MTV goes, is it harder for an artist like yourself to exist? Would it be virtually impossible for a group to come along like the Mothers Of Invention in 1987?

I would say the odds of a group like that appearing today and surviving would be nil. As far as me doing what I'm doing, I continue to do it. The thing that becomes increasingly difficult is for the audience to have access to it because, unless you're willing to pay off a radio station, the chances are you are not going to get your record on the radio. That's not my idea of a good time. The amount of stuff that is recorded by me that will appear on the radio is pretty small. As far as appearing on MTV, that is tied mostly to the way you look and, of course, a certain amount of promotional consideration. And the fact is, the videos are so expensive to make, one video costs more than a whole album. I'm self-financed, so I can't afford to spend a lot of money doing these things.

You did do a video for "<u>You Are What You Is</u>." Was that your last one?

That's the one. That's all there is. That's the only video I've made. The reason it was done was because it was financed by CBS International. They wanted it to show overseas. It didn't get showed a lot in the United States because I had Reagan getting the electric chair and a black guy dressed as a native spewing *Pepto Bismol* while saying the words "Mercedes Benz." I thought it was a good video.

Frank Zappa: Samplin' Fool

By Jeff Spurrier

Music & Sound Output, March 1987

Frank Zappa is a busy, busy man. With a new record out on his own Barking Pumpkin Records label, a 10-record boxed set of jive performances due this spring, interviews with journalists about his views on the PMRC music-censorship controversy, an autobiography deal just signed with Simon and Schuster, a radio special for the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, composing, editing and mixing work on new music, and a crew of employees to oversee (including a computer assistant, studio engineer and instrument specialists), it's surprising he has any time at all.

"Today I got up at six a.m. and I came down and looked at the news for a minute and I ate a bowl of cereal and then I went in there and started typing," says Zappa, lighting a cigarette and settling back into the couch in the television room next to the studio. "At 10 I did my first interview and then I did some more typing. Then I did a second interview at 11 and I typed some more. Then Bob Rice [the computer assistant] got here and we got set up to start mixing in there and then you came. And when you're done I'll take the pictures for this interview and then at 5:50 I've got the lady from the L.A. Museum coming over. Then at 7:50 I'm going down to do a test of these VHS bumpups that I have to do for some video editing. Then at 8:50 I'll come back to the house. I'll probably look at the news again and figure out if I want to do digital editing or work on the Synclavier."

Ah yes – the Synclavier. Of all of his daily duties, work on the Synclavier gives Zappa the most pleasure. This miraculous melding of computers, sampled sound and digital recording has changed his life enormously. Tucked away in a corner of the extensive state-of-the-art studio located on the first floor of his L.A. home, the Synclavier is Zappa's pride and joy. Over 80 percent of the music on his most recent release, *Jazz From Hell*, was performed on it.

"I've been in the record business since 1962, which is when I first bought a recording studio," says Zappa. And if I had had a Synclavier then, I doubt if I ever would have gone on the road. In fact I doubt if I ever would have left the house. Right now I hardly ever leave the house."

The house that Zappa built is secluded on a quiet residential street at the top of Laurel Canyon. Anonymous from the outside and protected from prying eyes by a metal gate and closed-circuit television cameras, the house contains one of the most elaborate home studios found in L.A. In addition to the main recording room (with hardwood floors and a two-story-high ceiling), there is a drum room, an isolation room, two jam-packed vaults (full of masters, demo tapes and video tapes), two Sony PCM 1524s, a PCM 1610, a PCM 1650, four BVUs for digital audio 3/4-inch video and masses of outboard gear. And of course there's also the Synclavier system: $265,000 worth of equipment built around 24 megabytes of memory. His electrical bills average around $2,000 a month.

Zappa calls his setup a cottage industry, but it's obviously much more than that. Thanks to the Synclavier, Zappa has entered the future world of binary composing, opening up his musical vistas to views most musicians barely dream of. "In the past, one of the considerations that every composer had to have in the back of his mind was who's going to play it, how good are they," he says. "You can write whatever you want, but you're going to take your chances to get a human being to do it. Now that concern is gone. You don't have to even care anymore. You just write whatever your imagination is and if you want to hear 15 in the space of 27/64th notes – which is what I typed in this morning – you'll get it. It's like taking a big weight off your shoulders.

"If you write for acoustic instruments, no matter how great your composition is, the quality of the piece when it's heard is going to be determined by the acoustics of the room, the mood and the skill of the players, the accuracy of the conductor and the budget for the rehearsal time. And basically all that is going against you – to say nothing of the possibility of copying errors when the score gets turned into parts. It's a pretty shoddy hit-and-miss-type situation. I write stuff that is rhythmically complex and has difficult intervals. If you had to physically play it on a real-life instrument, you would have a hard time reaching the intervals. So the machine just does it."

Of course, it's not that simple. While the Synclavier makes Zappa's composition process easier, there's a vast amount of basic sampling, trimming of samples, patch building and primary editing that has to be done before the music comes out of the speakers. And although he is working on the leading edge of computerized composing, Zappa says he still relies on basic skills he learned nearly 25 years ago when he took over a small recording studio in Cucamonga, California.

"That experience gave me all the basic experimentation time I needed to develop the techniques I still use today," he says. "Making multi-layer overdub recordings is a tricky business. There are a lot of things you can do which will sound ugly. There's only one way to learn it, and that's to get in and do it. There are no competent textbooks on anything like that. It's not easy figuring out how you get that sound: the sound that's in your head. You look at a roomful of equipment and you have to know what to plug in to make a sound."

To get the "particular sound" he's looking for now, Zappa, engineer Bob Stone, and Bob Rice spend hours recording samples of real instruments in the studio. These samples are then trimmed and stored in the Synclavier's memory, "like little specimens, a little pin stuck through each and placed in a jar." The samples are then linked together to build patches, lists of samples which "live" under selected notes on the Synclavier keyboard.

The work may be tedious, but the process is not as cut-and-dried as it sounds. "You have to make little editorial decisions when you make a sample," explains Zappa. "You have to decide is it going to be dry or ambient, do you want to have a long, deluxe sample or something more compact? Is it going to be looped? Some samples will stretch for octaves and others won't stretch but a couple of notes. Some things start to sound fake even stretching a minor third. Pianos don't stretch well. Harps stretch nicely. A harp note at C^3 will stretch all the way to C^7. Classical guitar stretches well also but fuzztone guitar doesn't stretch worth a shit.

"It has to do with the complexity and characteristics of the sound. Your ear doesn't want to believe that a single oboe note in the middle register is going to stretch more than a half or a whole step. Consequently certain instruments require more memory in RAM to live in there because there are more samples involved. Our stereo grand piano uses up 20 megabytes of RAM because the patch samples every other note in stereo. But it sounds like the real deal."

The real deal is important to Zappa. He says he doesn't use the Synclavier "as a cake decorator" but rather as an integral tool in composition. "Once the samples are captured and trimmed and I can hear what it is, then I can start hearing uses for it," he says. "I can see a composition build up just around a group of samples. The basic things we use all the time live on one of the Winchesters [disk drives]. Classical guitar, three or four different types of drum sets, different percussion patches. clarinets, bassoons – things that are used frequently are stock. Then all the specialty stuff we pull off the floppies?"

It may not sound much like normal music-making to the average musician, and indeed Zappa's love affair with the Synclavier has produced some unusual results. *Jazz From Hell* doesn't appear to even exist in the same universe as earlier Zappa classics such as *Cruising With Ruben and the Jets*, *200 Motels* or his joke songs "Valley Girl" and "Dancin' Fool." But for Zappa the Synclavier pieces are not songs.

"I don't think of these things I'm doing on the Synclavier as songs," he clarifies. "I think of them as items. They're not necessarily in song form. They're little compositions. The longest one I've done is 22 minutes, but most of them are in the five- to seven-minute range – a little long for a song and a little short for a symphony. And I approach them in an entirely different way than if I were writing a rock & roll song. Usually [a rock & roll song] starts off with a joke someone in the band has said or something you saw on television. You get some words and then you set them to music. Rock & roll is usually a lyric-generated medium."

The Zappa approach to his Synclavier "items" is as freeform as the system allows. There is no set pattern to the selection of samples, no chronological order to the birth of a song (*Jazz From Hell* took about eight months to make, but some of the bits and pieces began more than six years ago). And when it comes time to lay down tracks, the music goes where Zappa's whim takes him.

"It just depends on the kind of piece we're working on," he explains. "You can start from the end, start from the middle, start from the beginning, start from the edge. You can enter an idea. It may be the first thing you put in, but its location in the piece can be adjusted to any place in time. For example, you could start off with a little five-note figure, play it on the keyboard, and say, 'Okay, I designate you to be the hook.' But that doesn't mean when you push the button that's the first thing you hear, because you can turn a knob and locate those five notes a minute and 10 seconds into the piece. You can just dial it on down. You can also play in five notes and copy them as many times as you want and have those five notes played by all different instruments and make that figure appear any place you want.

"And then you play it literally however you want. If it's guitar then you play it on the guitar, literally. You choose the classical guitar patch, bring it to the keyboard, start playing it and you think like a guitar player. We've got a nice patch of mandolin tremolos. It's pressure-sensitive so we've got dynamics. We call it up and get in there and become an Italian for a minute."

With all these machines around, it's natural to wonder if Frank Zappa, a musician famous for his live shows, misses the sensuality of touring with a live band. "Sensuality?" he responds incredulously. "Please. I don't miss sweat, I don't miss stink, and I don't miss dressing-room food. I don't miss spending the entire day in airports. I don't miss any of that." He'd much rather spend his entire day in front of the little green screen, watching notes dance across in front of him. Or more precisely, that's how he'd prefer to spend his nights – his preferred time of work.

"The thing that's great about working at night, especially around here, is that the phone rings too much during the day time," he says. "I'd just as soon sleep through that shit and work when nobody's bothering me. Basically it's a fairly unglamorous thing to do: sit in front of that terminal and type and type and type. You don't need an audience for that, somebody keeping you company and holding your hand. It's just something that's got to be done. Same with the digital editing. It's not a spectator sport. It's like assembly-line work. Comfortable assembly-line work. It's either very cut and dried, because you're assembling stuff that's fairly obvious, or it's very subjective, because you have to make an editorial decision about where the guitar solo gets boring, how you get in and out of it.

"Last week I was getting up late. One night I got up at 10 at night and went to bed the next day at two in the afternoon and I felt terrific. And then suddenly one day I had this meeting at seven in the evening and it made me get up early and it screwed up my entire schedule. I'd be on nights right now if it hadn't been for that meeting. My body gets used to doing that. I'm totally happy to never see the sunshine."

Zappa is also totally happy to avoid breaks from his work. He says the closest he gets to a vacation is watching CNN; his current outside musical experience is limited to the advertising jingles he hears during the news.

Amidst all the activity, one question remains: will Zappa ever feel the urge to cast off his frenetic schedule and move at a more leisurely pace? He estimates that about 50 percent of his work has yet to be put on vinyl. What will happen to the vaults full of material, the studio, the "cottage industry" he's built up in his cozy home?

"You mean when I don't want to work anymore?" he snorts. "Get a yacht like Simon Le Bon? We'll worry about that when I get to it. My biggest problem is I can't imagine doing anything else. I'm not interested in sports or any other form of recreation."

Zappa On Jazz From Hell

By Frank Zappa

Music & Sound Output, March 1987

Night School started off as four or five chords, played into the Synclavier. I had some guys here hanging out in the studio one night and I was giving them a demonstration of the machine. I played these chords and saved them on a floppy, and that's how that one got started. Everything else was built up from that *dahdahdat dadah* thing. The melody that was super-imposed on top of it – it sounds kind of like a piano and kind of like a trumpet – was something I just improvised. All the rest of the rhythm-section data was added partially from the keyboard and partially from the Roland Octapads.

Beltway Bandits is a really old one. The rhythm is a round, the parts are staggered. They're staggered so they interlock with each other. A simple rhythm becomes more complex, times four, when you copy the same part and stagger it a certain number of beats. The harmony that's used is all derived from this book called *The Chord Bible*. Every composer has notes, chords and rhythms that he likes to hear. Some people keep it all in their head and some people will jot down little sketches. Several years ago I made a classification of all of my favorite chords plus the order in which I preferred to hear the pitches in the chords arpeggiated. It's all broken down from three-note, four-note, five-note, six-note, eight-note chords. The chords are in different classifications, starting with those chords that have a minor second as the uppermost interval, major second, minor third, blah blah blah blah blah, all the way down to the fewest chords that have the minor ninth as the upper interval of the chord. There are real dense voice chords and chords that

cover four or five octaves. There's a whole variety in the book. The harmony in "Beltway Bandits" is derived from *Chord Bible* harmony, and usually it's four- and five-note harmony. There are a couple of seven-note chords in there also.

While You Were Art began as a guitar solo on a song called "While You Were Out" on an album released in 1980. A chamber group from Cal Arts commissioned me to write an arrangement of that guitar solo for their ensemble – cello, clarinet, two percussion, two keyboards. There might have been a flute, too. No guitar. The solo on the LP had been transcribed by Steve Vai and was available in this guitar book of solos, so Bob Rice typed into the Synclavier the original rhythms, which were all real complicated, and then taking that basic material I put it through a bunch of permutations and came out with this piece. They came over to pick up the parts and they looked at it and said, "Oh, this is real hard. We don't have enough time to rehearse it. What are we going to do?" I said, "No Problem. I'll have the machine play it for you and we'll make this tape and you guys will go on stage and you'll lip-sync it and nobody will know." And *nobody* knew. Not the *Los Angeles Times* critic, not the *Herald Examiner* critic, not the guy who ran the concert series. None of them knew they didn't play a note and that all the sound was coming off of a little cassette. They found out afterward, of course. So what? That's really the music of the Eighties. Nobody listens any more. You just want to watch stuff anyway. This is not that arrangement because that performance didn't even have any samples. It was all FM synthesis. That gives you a rough idea how far away from real sounds the performance actually was and people still didn't actually know. So when I got the polyphonic sampling system I took the thing they had played, put some samples on it, tweaked it again and that's the version on the record.

Jazz From Hell is from within the last four months. It started off with a patch that was built that contained a tenor sax, some samples of this little string-section chords, odds and ends. The basic sound of the patch was the tenor sax, but every time you'd hit a note to get the tenor sax you'd have something else added to it. In one octave it might be a re-synth solo violin; another octave it might be a gut-string guitar. It was just a mix-and-match patch. It was pressure-sensitive so you could get in and style it. That started off with me just laying down a stylized melody line with the tenor sax, and the rest was added as accompaniment, like all the keyboard parts; the Fender Rhodes part in there is just me grabbing my favorite mystery chord at random and plopping it in. Even though the intervals are a little peculiar, in some ways it's got the feeling like someone could have been comping that twisted solo that's there.

G-Spot Tornado is kind of put together as a twisted version of Ravel's "Bolero" where you've got a tune you can recognize and it goes through a lot of orchestration changes, segment by segment, with the synthesizer solos in the middle. That's another improvised solo I stuck in.

Damp Ankles is probably about two years old. It had been sitting around. I've got boxes of floppies with compositions that have been started and are in various stages of development I've had since I got the Synclavier. I don't work on one thing all the way through. "Damp Ankles" was the one I had the most trouble with because of the nature of the sounds that were in it. When it was originally typed in, we didn't have a velocity keyboard, so I had to find a way to artificially impose dynamic information onto those sounds. I had tried replacing the original FM timbres that were used with samples and it didn't have the same character. So I went back to the original timbres to keep the original mood of the piece and then added some samples around it for the rhythm section. But it just wouldn't behave. I worked on that one for a long time.

The dynamics of the velocity information exist in that computer as a list of numbers of amplitude values from 0 to 100. So 100 means that's all you get. That's as loud as it'll ever be. When there's no velocity information, all the parts are at 100 percent. It's fairly charmless, especially if you have kind of a synthesizer woodwind sound. It just grates on you after a while. C^7 is the highest note on the keyboard so that's 100 percent. C^7 equals 100. C^2 is not the lowest note; the lowest playable note is A^0, but C^2 is about the quietest dynamic you might want to use. Below that it's very, very subtle. So you write an extra composition using only the notes between C^2 and C^7 and those pitches you type in in this auxiliary composition then become the dynamic code for the individual instrument that's reading that. So you set up a situation where the computer reads this other piece of music and converts the musical data into dynamics. That's how we did it. That's taxing the system.

St. Etienne was included because I felt it might be nice to have a contrast with something that sounded like a real live band in the middle of all the mechanical stuff.

The last thing in the record is **Massaggio Galore**. I did a radio show for the L.A. Museum of Contemporary Art that will be on the air in the spring. It's one of the selections that was included in that radio show. The guy I did it with does this imitation in one part of the show of a radio disc jockey who is announcing a record by a group called the Scumbags and the name of the song was "Massaggio Galore." And that's the tune that was used in the show.

As told to Jeff Spurrier

"On Junk Food for the Soul. In Defense of Rock and Roll"

Frank Zappa's article from New Perspective's Quarterly on America's cultural decay **1988**

«New Perspective's Quarterly», iv, 4, winter 1988, pp. 26-29

Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention were one of the strongest influences on early rock n' roll. In recent years, Zappa has publicly defended rock from cultural conservatives like Tipper Gore and her group, the Parents' Music Resource Center, which seeks greater parental control over what they consider the inordinate influence of sex and violence in rock music.

We asked Frank Zappa to respond to selected passages from The Closing of the American Mind, in which Allan Bloom laments "Parents' loss of control over their children's moral education,' and provocatively labels rock music "junk food for the soul."

THE NATURE OF MUSIC

"Music is the soul's primitive and primary speech... without articulate speech or reason. It is not only not reasonable, it is hostile to reason...Civilization... is the taming or domestication of the soul's raw passions... Rock music has one appeal only, a barbaric appeal, to sexual desire- not love, not eros, but sexual desire undeveloped and untutored." -- A. Bloom

This is a puff pastry version of the belief that music is the work of the Devil: that the nasty ol' Devil plays his fiddle and people dance around and we don't want to see them twitching like that. In fact, if one wants to be a real artist in the United States today and comment on our culture, one would be very far off the track if one did something delicate or sublime. This is not a noble, delicate, sublime country. This is a mess run by criminals. Performers who are doing the crude, vulgar, repulsive things Bloom doesn't enjoy are only commenting on that fact.

In general, anti-rock propositions began when rock n' roll began, and most of these were racially motivated. In the 50s, petitions were circulated which said, "Don't allow your children to buy Negro records." The petitions referred to the "raw unbridled passion" of screaming people with dark skin who were going to drive our children wild. Some things never go out of fashion in certain ideological camps. They are like tenets of the faith.

Music's real effect on people is a new field of science called psychoacoustics- the way and organism deals with wiggling air molecules. Our ears decode the wiggling air molecules, and that gives us the information of a particular musical sound. Our brain says, "This is music, this is a structure," and we deal with it based on certain tools we have acquired.

I personally make music because I want to ask a question, and I want to get an answer. If that question and answer amuse me, then statistically, there are a certain number of

other people out there who have the same amusement factor. If I present my work to them, they will be amused by it, and we will all have a good time.

I need to be amused because I get bored easily and being amused entertains me. If I could be easily amused, like many people who like beer and football, I would never do anything because everything that would be beautiful for my life would already be provided by American television.

But bear and television bore me, so what am I going to do? I am going to be alive for X number of years. I have to do something with my time besides sleep and eat. So, I devise little things to amuse myself. If I can amuse somebody else, great. And if I can amuse somebody else and earn a living while doing it, that is a true miracle in the 20th Century!

MUSIC AND THE DARK FORCES OF THE SOUL

"To Plato and Nietzsche, the history of music is a series of attempts to give form and beauty to the dark, chaotic, premonitory forces in the soul- to make them serve a higher purpose, and ideal, to give man's duties a fullness. --A. Bloom

This is a man who has fallen for rock's fabricated image of itself. This is the worst kind of ivory tower intellectualism. Anybody who talks about dark forces is right on the fringe of mumbo jumbo. Dark forces? What is this, another product from Lucasfilm? The passions! When was the last time you saw an American exhibit any form of passion other than the desire to shoot a guy on the freeway? Those are the forces of evil as far as I'm concerned.

If there are dark forces hovering in the vicinity of the music business, they are mercantile forces. We meet the darkness when we meet the orchestra committees, when we get in touch with funding organizations, when we deal with people who give grants and when we get into the world of commerce that greets us when we arrive with our piece of art. Whether it's a rock n' roll record or a symphony, it's the same machinery lurking out there.

The reason a person writes a piece of music has got nothing to do with dark forces. I certainly don't have dark forces lurking around me when I'm writing. If someone is going to write a piece of music, in fact they are preoccupied with the boring labor and very hard work involved. That's what's really going on.

WHAT MAKES MUSIC CLASSICAL

"Rock music... has risen to its current heights in the education of the young on the ashes of classical music, and in an atmosphere in which there is no intellectual resistance to attempts to tap the rawest passions... Cultivation of the soul uses the passions and satisfies them while sublimating them and giving them an artistic unity. Bach's religious intentions and Beethoven's revolutionary and humane ones are clear enough examples." --A. Bloom

This is such nonsense. All the people recognized as great classical composers are recognized at this point for two reasons:

One, during the time these composers were alive and writing they had patrons who liked what they did and who therefore paid them money or gave them a place to live so that the

composers could stay alive by writing dots on pieces of paper. If any of the compositions these men wrote had not been pleasing to a church, a duke, or a king, they would have been out of work and their music would not have survived.

There is a book called Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, with thousands of names in it. You have never heard of most of the people in that book, nor have you heard their music. That doesn't mean they wrote awful music, it means they didn't have hits.

So basically, the people who are recognized as the geniuses of classical music had hits. And the person who determined whether or not it was a hit was a king, a duke, or the church or whoever paid the bill. The desire to get a sandwich or something to drink had a lot to do with it. And the content of what they wrote was to a degree determined by the musical predilections of the guy who was paying the bill.

Today, we have a similar situation in rock n' roll. We have kings, dukes, and popes: the A&R guy who spots a group or screens the tape when it comes in; the business affairs guy who writes the contract; the radio station programmers who choose what records get air play.

The other reason the classical greats survived is their works are played over and over again by orchestras. The reasons they are played over and over again are: 1) all the musicians in the orchestra know how to play them because they learned them in the conservatory; 2) the orchestra management programs these pieces because the musicians already know them and therefore it costs less to rehearse them; 3) the composers are dead so the orchestras pay no royalties for the use of the music.

Today, survivability is based on the number of specimens in the market place- the sheer numbers of plastic objects. Many other compositions from this era will vanish, but Michael Jackson's Thriller album will survive because there are 30 million odd pieces of plastic out there. No matter what we may think of the content, a future generation may pick up that piece of plastic and say, "Oh, they were like this."

I suppose somewhere in the future there will be other men like Bloom certifying that the very narrow spectrum of rock n' roll which survives composes the great works of the later half of the 20th Century.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CLASSICAL MUSIC AND ROCK MUSIC

"Rock music provides premature ecstasy and, in this respect, is like the drugs with which it is allied... These are the three great lyrical themes: sex, hate and a smarmy, hypocritical version of brotherly love... Nothing noble, sublime, profound, delicate, tasteful or even decent can find a place in such tableaux." -- A. Bloom

Again, Bloom is not looking at what is really going on here. The ugliness in this society is not a product of unrefined art, but of unrefined commerce, wild superstition and religious fanaticism.

The real difference between the classics and rock n' roll is mostly a matter of form. In order to say we have written a symphony, the design we put on a piece of paper has to conform to certain specifications. We have an exposition that lasts a certain amount of time, then modulation, development and recapitulation. It's like a box, like an egg carton.

We must fill all the little spaces in the egg carton with the right forms. If we do, we can call it a symphony because it conforms to the spaces in that box.

Compare that creative process to rock n' roll. If we want to have an AM hit record, we have another egg carton to fill. We have an intro, a couple of verses, a bridge, another verse, and then a fade out. All of which requires a "hook." That's a very rigid form. If we wander away from that form, our song's not going to go on the radio because it doesn't sound like it fits in their format.

Now, whether the person writing the song graduated from a conservatory or whether they came out of a garage, they know that in order to finish a piece they have to do certain things to make it fit into a certain form. In the classical period the sonata or a concerto or symphony had to be that certain size and shape or else the king was not going to like it. One could die. These were literally matters of life and death, but not in the way Bloom defines them.

THE ROCK BUSINESS

"The family spiritual void has left the field open to rock music... The result is nothing less than parents' loss of control over their children's moral education at a time when no one else is seriously concerned with it. This has been achieved by an alliance of strange young males who have the gift of divining the mob's emergent wishes- our versions of Thrasymachus, Socrates' rhetorical adversary- and the record-company executives, the new robber barons, who mine gold out of rock." -- A. Bloom

There is some truth to that, but how did we get to this point and what do we do about it?

We got here because teenagers are the most sought after consumers. The whole idea of merchandising the pre-pubescent masturbational fantasy is not necessarily the work of the songwriter or the singer, but the work of the merchandiser who has elevated rock n' roll to the commercial enterprise it is.

In the beginning, rock n' roll was young kids singing to other kids about their girlfriends. That's all there was. The guys who made those records came from Manual Arts High School. They went into a recording studio, were given some wine, $25 and a bunch of records when their song came out as a single- which made them heroes at school. That was their career, not, "Well, we're not going to sing until we get a $125 thousand advance."

Today, rock n' roll is about getting a contract with a major company, and pretty much doing what the company tells you to do. The company promotes the image of rock n' roll as being wild and fun when in fact it's just a dismal business.

Record companies have people who claim to be experts on what the public really wants to hear. And they inflict their taste on the people who actually make the music. To be a big success, you need a really big company behind you because really big companies can make really big distribution deals.

Even people who are waiting to go into the business know it's a business. They spend a great deal of time planning what they will look like and getting a good publicity photo before they walk in the door with their tape. And the record companies tend to take the

attitude that it doesn't make too much difference what the tape sounds like as long as the artists look right, because they can always hire a producer who will fix up the sound and make it the way they want it- so long as the people wear the right clothes and have the right hair.

RETAINING CLASSICAL MUSIC

"Classical music is dead among the young... Rock music is as unquestioned and unproblematic as the air the students breath, and very few have any acquaintance at all with classical music... Classical music is now a special taste, like Greek language or pre-Columbian archeology, not a common culture of reciprocal communication and psychological shorthand." -- A. Bloom

On this point, Bloom and I can agree, but how can a child be blamed for consuming only that which is presented to him? Most kids have never been in contact with anything other than this highly merchandised stuff.

When I testified in front of the Senate, I pointed out that if they don't like the idea of young people buying certain kinds of music, why don't they stick a few dollars back into the school system to have music appreciation? There are kids today who have never heard a string quartet; they have never heard a symphony orchestra. I argued that the money for music appreciation courses, in terms of social good and other benefits such as improved behavior or uplifting the spirit, is far less than the cost of another set of uniforms for the football team. But I frankly don't see people waving banners in the streets saying more music appreciation in the schools.

When I was in school, we could go into a room and they had records there. I could hear anything I wanted by going in there and putting on a record. I won't say I enjoyed everything that was played for me, but I was curious, and if I had never heard any of that music I wouldn't know about it.

Once we're out of school, the time we can spend doing that type of research is limited because most of us are out looking for a job flipping hamburgers in the great tradition of the Reagan economic miracle. When all is said and done, that's the real source of America's barren and arid lives.

Chris Ekman sez: "This article was commissioned from the New Perspectives Quarterly as part of an issue on America's Cultural Decay. (You may have seen a bit of it quoted in Watson's book.) I think it would make a good companion with the Life Magazine "New Rock" manifesto. It dates from 1987. " Thanks for the article, Chris.

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http://www.hemisfear.com/zappa/bmarshall.htm (cfr. FZ Apocripha)

Bob Marshall Interview

This interview took place during a 7-hour visit with the very hospitable Frank Zappa at his home between 8:00P.M., Oct.21 and 3:00 A.M., Oct.22, 1988. Dr. Carolyn Dean and Gerald Fialka assisted Bob Marshall in conducting the interview. We thank Loren Gagnon for transcribing the original audio tapes.

Bob Marshall: In your mini-manifesto on JOE'S GARAGE where you say "Information is not knowledge, Knowledge is not wisdom,... etc.", at the end you say "Music is THE BEST". What is Music?
Frank Zappa: Well, in the terms, I would use two different definitions for it, one in the clinical sense and one in the sense that applies to that little statement on the album. In the sense of the statement on the album, it would mean whatever you happen to think music is. That's a statement to other people and they would plug into that statement their concept of what music is. I'll recite it for you just for the people who don't have the albums:

> Information is not knowledge,
> Knowledge is not wisdom,
> Wisdom is not truth,
> Truth is not beauty,
> Beauty is not love,
> Love is not music
> and Music is THE BEST

So, you get to figure out what your idea of music is and plug it into that.
BM: I find that little manifesto resonates so much with many points that you have said through the years in your interviews. For example, I don't know of it any earlier but in the Fall of '79, in Rolling Stone, was one of the first times that you talked about yourself as a "journalist". Am I wrong? Did you talk about it in earlier interviews I'm not aware of?
FZ: I don't know whether or not I talked about it in interviews earlier, but there's always been a journalistic aspect in my work even from the first album because if a person writes a song about a current event that's a journalistic technique. And I would say certainly a song about the Watts Riot, which was on the FREAK OUT! album, qualified as some for of journalism because a lot of people don't even remember what the Watts Riot was, and so, at the point where you make the song, the Watts Riot was a recent journalistic event, it was recently in the news, but over a period of years, people forget what the news was and now it just becomes folklore. The fact is Channel 5 in Los Angeles, which showed the pictures of the riot, did have a story about a woman sawed in half by 50-caliber machine gun bullets from the National Guard that was down there taking care of the riot. And that may be the only lasting monument to the woman who got sawed in half. There's a lot of things like that in songs that go from journalism into folklore with people and the events that they are involved in. The songs were news at the time that they happened but over a period of time, who cares about the news anymore and then it's just folklore.

BM: I see that and that's the opening word - "Information". I relate that to your statement in Life magazine this summer that you "hum the news". There seems to be a metaphor that you're replaying here as music. Your work is journalistic yet you're turning the news as folklore into some kind of musical art form.
FZ: That's an interesting way of juggling this stuff around and there's a certain aspect of it, but I would say that the only part of the news that turns into the music is the lyrics. It's pretty hard to convert something like election statistics into something that you can hum, really.
BM: So you mean the news lyrics is what you hum. But don't you include the news of musical trends? Where you do your satire of musical styles, isn't there a trendy newsy level there?
FZ: Usually by the time I'm making fun of it, it's no longer news because in order to make fun of something everybody has to know the ground rules for the joke to work, so it would be ridiculous to make fun of punk orchestration, everybody else had some idea of what punk sounded like so that you can make a parody of it. You can't be newsworthy like in a timely fashion, with a musical parody
BM: But when it becomes an environment, a cliche.
FZ: Yeah, it's when it has saturated the cultural environment and everybody knows that people, with hair sticking up in a certain direction, with guitars totally out of tune, banging a couple of chords for one and a half minutes constitutes a musical form. Then you can make fun of it.
BM: So when you say "I hum the news", you mean the lyrics.
FZ: Yeah I'm talking more about the lyrics rather than the notes.
BM: Is there an ethical question there about humming the news? Are you satirizing people's involvement in the news? I mean, people would see that you're entertaining the news, putting it in an entertainment form. Some people might see it that way.
FZ: No, actually what I do with the news is I have the ability to watch news from all different kinds of sources and remember the details, and collate the details, and come up with a conclusion other than which the people who own the media want you to come away with. If you watch only one news service you're not getting the full picture. They try and tell you major world events in ten seconds, and you can't do that. So what you have to do is compare different outlets, compare their spins, compare that to print, and then draw your conclusions. And also reinforce that by first-hand conversations with people who might be there or might know something about it. I generally don't have access to those kinds of people when it's applied to U.S. politics, but in terms of things going on in other countries the information we receive here about what happens outside the U.S. is really quite thin. And since I do travel around it's easy for me to talk to people in the different countries and say what really happened. And to that extent I know more about foreign events than the average guy in the United States because I have some way to...
BM: Direct access to the experiences.
FZ: Yeah, to develop the picture a little bit. In fact, I got some extra information just last night on things that are happening in South America. It puts me in a situation where the political part of my brain is looking at the world and saying, "I see trends developing and they're really horrible", and the musician part of my brain says, "I would really like to be just sitting in that room in there working on the Synclavier because that's more fun than anything else". And I spend my day trying to put these two parts of my brain together, and usually what happens is that at the end of the work-period there will be a product that comes out that is a combination of those two parts of my brain: what I know about what's going on in the world, plus what I like to do with music
BM: That's the process of resolving the dilemma of being a musical specialist in an information surround that makes you in touch with so many things.
FZ: Yeah.

BM: And then you add your particular slant to it through your own sources.
FZ: Yeah.
BM: That's what I was interested in, you as a journalist, and I was wondering which was more prominent: the political or the musical. But you're saying you're not sure, you work out where you...
FZ: At this point they seem to be about 50-50. It's not exactly like being Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, but it's hard for me to go in there and just work on music and forget about what's really going on in the world. I can't do it. I can't take what I know and throw it away and say, "Well, I just won't care anymore because I can't do anything about it." First of all, I think I might be able to do something about it, and just because I might, I have to keep thinking about it. So, there's no easy way to dispose of it.
BM: So your activity dealing with the PMRC, I guess from '85 to '87, was not a radical departure from your interests. It was how you manifested that dilemma for yourself. That was the most immediate concern that you could deal with. You had to go political at that point.
FZ: I wouldn't say that was even going political. That was a civic obligation because I saw...
BM: Well, that's what I mean by "political". Do you mean something else? Do you mean propagandistic by "political"?
FZ: No, we have a little semantic problem here because usually the way I talk about politics is in one sense and I've said this many times in interviews: politics is the entertainment branch of industry. When I talk about my political thoughts, I'm not talking about being part of the entertainment branch of industry. I'm talking more about policy in action. In other words, somebody has to decide to do certain things or not do certain things, and hopefully the person makes that decision has made the decision based on accurate information. The problem with most of the decisions of the last eight years in the Reagan Administration is they're all ideologically based and very seldom have the policy decisions been based on practicality, or far long-range thinking. It's just been based on whether or not the rhetoric that appears in the news that day is in phase with conservative ideology, or appeasement to certain interest groups. It's not good politics in the true sense of the word. And another political act that you have to bear in mind is as long as people have the right to vote, the vote should be cast in a situation where the person with the ballot in his hand has access to enough information to make a practical decision. And that's where I come in. If I can provide an extra dimension of information which may, through this interview or through a record or some other way, get out to a person with a ballot in his hand, I'm doing a public service by providing compilations of data that the news won't give you. It's not that they can't give it to you, they won't give it to you. So, that's the way I think about politics the way I'm involved in it.
BM: Taking a statement that you made to Warner Brothers in 1971 in a pamphlet called "Hey, Snazzy Execs": "We make a special art in an environment hostile to dreamers"...
FZ: That's right. The environment that is hostile to dreamers is always the environment that is run by right-wing administrations because in order for the right-wing administration to maintain its fiction, it has to be ideologically pure and that ideology does not admit for creativity. There is nothing creative about a right-wing administration. The whole goal of it is to freeze time and to move things backward. So, obviously the people who are most at risk, whenever there is a right-wing administration sitting in place, is anybody who is an intellectual dreamer or creative person in any field. They are at risk because they pose a threat to the administration.
BM: But you were quite vocal about certain left-wing elements in the Sixties.
FZ: I don't think that the left wing is anything to invest in. I think that the left wing has probably done as much damage as any other kind of political force. I think common sense is the way to go. There's no ideology for common sense. It's easy to talk about politics in

terms of right and left wing because that's the way the news portrays it. And so to a degree, if I talk about political things I have to use the common parlance so people understand it. But I think of myself as a person devoted to practical and commonsense solutions to things that are real problems, and they oftentimes sound weird if suggested simply because people are so attached to the ideological ramblings of the right or the ideological ramblings of the left. They think that you have to choose between these two extremes. On the left you've got Communism. Well, Communism doesn't work. It absolutely doesn't work, and on the right you have Fascism and that doesn't work either.
BM: So both environments are hostile to dreamers. Both political ideologies...
FZ: No, because the difference here is that the left has often employed artists and creative people in order to further their goals. For the right-wing administration, the artists and dreamers are a threat to their way of life. And for the left-wing guys, the artists and dreamers are propaganda. So there's a danger coming from both directions. One side would like to snuff you out and the other side would like to co-opt you and usurp you in order to have you do stuff and promote their ideals. So, anybody who's got an imagination has to watch out for both sides. There's only one place where you're safe and that's in the middle.
BM: You think you could work with a creatively sympathetic group like the leftists and keep them on their toes. You wouldn't be co-opted and it'd be better than a right-wing...
FZ: I'm not interested in working with any leftist organization I tell you the truth. I've said it many times...
BM: No, I mean work in their environment.
FZ: No, fuck their environment because I refuse to be used by any of those people.
BM: But you emphasized at the beginning that the right wing was more threatening for you.
FZ: The right would like to put you out of business and the left would like to hire you, and I'm not for hire. I don't think that anybody who has a truly individualistic way of evaluating the world of a creative urge to do unique stuff needs to be snuffed out or hired. You should be free to do what your abilities will allow you to do because it is only when you are free to do that, the benefits of what you can build will be distributed to those parts of the society who will find your work useful. Really creative people don't work good as employees.
BM: But you're saying there is more of a threat in the right-wing environment.
FZ: Yeah, that's the threat of death.
BM: You think of yourself as having common sense. Would you define the word "art" as a sensory training for common-sense perceptions or is that too dramatic?
FZ: I think the word "art" has been pretty much flogged into porridge. Today you hear the word "art" and you think of people who do paintings and have their work admired by rich people at cocktail parties, and it conjures up a world of phony stuff, and I don't participate in that world. I'm happy that it's there for the people who like it. It's a nice form of entertainment for them but to me that's not what it's all about. I don't think that training people to consume art in that sense makes them any more sensitive, or more highly developed or refined in any way. It doesn't make them a better person, it just makes them a dupe for a bogus way of life. That art world really is a way of abusing the people who made the art in the first place. The best example is the common Soho gallery split of 60-40: 60% for the gallery owner, 40% for the artist. I mean, in the worst rock and roll record contract you don't get that kind of a reaming. So, so much for the art world.
BM: I think way back about 1970 in the New York Times you said that "my work is art". I think you meant "art" in a different way there.
FZ: Yeah. If I think of it as being a pure expression of who I am, what I do and what I think, that's fine and I'll call it "art", but I'll call it "art" privately. I mean, you've gotta understand, I'm not walking around with an art banner in my hand. The problem with communicating with anybody in the English language is that so much damage has been done to the

language itself by advertisers, by political campaigns, that the words themselves have been mutated to the point where you have to choose them really carefully because even if in fact it is "art", you don't way to say it's "Art" because the negative connotations of calling it "art" puts a weird spin on what you're saying. So I generally try and avoid any connection with that word just because it impedes the process of trying to get your point across. If you're going to talk to somebody, you want to talk to them in a language they can understand using words that they're familiar with. That should be a goal for communication and "art" is one of the bad words these days.
BM: In other words, you target an audience for the point you want to get across.
FZ: Yeah.
BM: That's the traditional art of rhetoric in classical education. I don't know if you came across that. It's a rhetorical technique.
FZ: I didn't have a classical education so I don't know it from these things.
BM: Alright. So, one would say that your emphasis is rhetorical, not in the modern propagandistic sense, but targeting an audience, not necessarily for the whole album, but particular songs, in a musical sense.
FZ: Well, "targeting" is the wrong word because that presumes that it's narrowcasting. It's not. What I have to do is make an assumption about the comprehension abilities of the people that would be the likely consumers for what I do. In other words, I have to conjure up in my brain an imaginary picture of who the guy is, how smart he is, how many references he might have that I can make through metaphorical references in a work. I have to have some sort of a plan, O.K. And then once I've made that model, I can then decide, as I'm writing the piece, if this is going to whiz over his head, going to whiz past him, or what it is. And if so, should it go in there anyway or should I change it and say it blunt?
BM: That's part of your composing process?
FZ: Yeah, and in order to arrive at that imaginary model of the person who is listening to the stuff, it's not based on thin air. I mean, I actually talk to the people who are fans for what I do. I've met them, I've talked to them, I have some idea of what their desires are. I know what they like, what they don't like, and to the extent that I have personal contact with them, that's the data that went into building the model.
BM: Although, you do say that all your music is an extension of you, but you also say that the audience is the employer in other quotes.
FZ: That's true, but the music is an extension of me but the "me" is an entity that knows certain things. Part of what I know is what the audience is interested in and so that doesn't seem incongruous at all. The audience employs me to entertain them. By purchasing an album, you have hired me to entertain you for forty minutes, or whatever it is that's in the album, and my goal is to do that in a way that is going to be useful to you.

Part 2

BM: I remember there was a quote back about 1970: "Someone is getting off on this beyond his or her wildest comprehensions"
FZ: I've had letters from people saying, "It was me! It was me!"
BM: I think I claimed that to you in 1985 myself
FZ: "Look at my head! The top of my head is gone! It was me! I can prove it!"
BM: "I'm dead!" (both laughing). What did you think you meant in targeting that or was that just a general principle?
FZ: You have to have an average of what is going on out there and when you opt to do the thing that is going to whiz over most people's heads, you know that there's going to be a certain percentage in there that will be tall enough where it's going to get them right in the middle of their head.

BM: That's targeting.
FZ: Yeah, that's the targeting. You see, I don't know too many of those kinds of people who really get it all. That would be the truly rare individual. Because in order for them to get it all they have to know what I know. Which means, not that I'm so smart, but I've had experiences that they haven't had just because people are unique. So, nobody gets 100% but if anybody ever got 60%, they'd be in big trouble.
BM: "Big trouble"? Is that a facetious remark?
FZ: Yeah.
BM: I think it was on HOT RATS that you said: "This is a movie for your ears". Do you remember that phrase.
FZ: Yeah.
BM: A rather intelligent critic at that time, not known by many people, described your work up to that point as "a visualization of a kaleidoscope of textures". If one juxtaposes the word "visualization" with your early statement that your work "incorporates any available visual medium, consciousness, of all participants (including audience", which we've talked about, "all perceptual deficiencies", and a few other points, why do you say "any available visual medium" Since most people would think of you as a musician.
FZ: That's only because they don't know what I can do in the other medium. I've always been able to manipulate pictures since I first got hold of a pencil and paper. I started off drawing before I could...
BM: Before you had music in your head?
FZ: Yeah, and there was no music in our household when I was a kid. I came to it late, but I've always been interested in the way in which pictures work with music and the problem about doing more of it is that a visual medium is a far more expensive medium that the audio medium. An independent guy can afford to make an album easier than he can afford to make a movie, or then he can afford to make a video, and have some quality in it. So there's only occasionally that I can scrape up enough money to do a project that involves pictures and music. So that part of my work is less known than the records that I have out and that's one of the reasons for putting Honker Home Video together because at least with that company, some of the things that I've done working with visual stuff can be gotten out to the public.
BM: But with the phrase "movie for your ears", you emphasize the visual. Is the "conceptual continuity" a movie?
FZ: No, because in order to make it complete, you have to involve what you see. It's a total sensory thing.
BM: Is that your definition of music? It includes all senses?
FZ: If you get to the other definition of music that I use when I'm working on my stuff, it means the organization of any data.
BM: Visual, acoustic, smells...
FZ: Yeah, choreography, anything, any data. So long as you say to yourself, "I'm now making a musical composition of this stuff", the composition can include stuff that's living in this ashtray, whatever it is. So long as you willfully organize it into that object that you're making. That's the criteria that I would use.
BM: That would be a criterion that's modern, a product of television because television uses all data. I always thought it was interesting that you had yourself in a TV screen on FREAK OUT! The cover image has always struck me as a colour TV image, the colouring...
FZ: Oh yeah. Well, that's not what the intent was, but go on.
BM: You had the lines, it looked like a damaged colour TV (laughs), the colouring. But you did not intend that?
FZ: No.

BM: O.K., I projected that anyway. But I find it interesting. I don't think earlier composers would talk about using all data in the way you're doing unless there have been... you can correct me.
FZ: As far as I know, I don't think there's anybody that has worked in contemporary composition that has the familiarity with the technical side that I do. I'm not talking about electronic music composers. I'm talking about just a general knowledge of all different...
BM: Media?
FZ: Yeah, just every tool that you can use. If I can't get in with a soldering iron and fix it or build it, I certainly know how to use it and what some uses might be of the tool that the guy who invented it never imagined. One of my specialties is taking existing off-the-shelf stuff and twisting it to do something that the guy who manufactured it never thought it would be used for. That's a hobby.
BM: Weren't you asked to name the band "Mothers of Invention"? You were asked to add on "of Invention"?
FZ: Yeah. Well, we were just told we couldn't use the name "Mothers".
BM: So you suggested "Mothers of Invention".
FZ: Yeah.
BM: But that was an accurate statement of your talents - to be able to work with many technologies. Were you aware of that at the time?
FZ: That wasn't the reason for sticking it on there. It was just a practical decision that had to be made at the time of the FREAK OUT! album because they were refusing to release the album. It was so stupid. You can imagine the A&R department at Verve Records saying, "We can't release this record because no disc jockey will play a song by 'The Mothers' on the radio". Well, no disc jockey would play the content of the record no matter what the name of the group was. You could have called it "The Smelts" or something, they still wouldn't have played it. But that's the way it was. People were just afraid. I guess they're still afraid.
BM: I'm going to move into your role as a symbolist. Do you know the Symbolist group in art history?
FZ: No, I'm not familiar with Art history. Tell me about it.
BM: Well, the Symbolists broke up normal images and reformed them, juxtaposed them.
FZ: Is this based on Jung?
BM: No, this was before him. This was a hundred years ago with poets like Rimbaud and Baudelaire. Literary historians grouped them into this movement called the Symbolists. There was a man who wrote a book at the turn of this century called "The Symbolist Movement in Literature". He tagged that name on them, but it was the emphasis on a symbol as the primary focus or motif in one's art.
FZ: Well, I suppose I belong in there. Anybody who has said as much as I have about poodles ought to have some sort of a recommendation in that group. But it wasn't because I decided to join a movement.
BM: Maybe there are historical forces, ways of thinking that you tapped into and continued a tradition unconsciously. I mean, from the critic's point of view. I think it was Miles who was the first one who wrote about your repetition of motifs in his early articles in the late Sixties. I remember one of his questions from International Times where he asked "Is there an IDEA behind your work?". It was capitalized in the newspaper. And I think that's what I'm trying to get at.
FZ: That's simple. It's that the Emperor's not wearing any clothes, never has, never will.
BM: What is the Emperor?
FZ: Fill in the blank. (laughs)
BM: So the idea is that you're making a symbol that allows other people to participate in it.
FZ: That's audience participation on a grand scale. It's like name your poison. Why, that's almost elegant.

BM: What is?
FZ: Structuring something the way that people get to participate in it by adding their missing ingredient. It's like, be your own catalyst.
BM: That is a tradition that T.S. Eliot, Joyce and Pound articulated. When people asked Eliot the meaning of the poem, he would shrug his shoulders, and then they would give what they thought it meant and...
FZ: He would say they're right.
BM: Yes, Eliot would say, "You're right".
FZ: Well you see, I didn't have that kind of an education. I have no knowledge of the history of art or poetry, or any of that kind of stuff. It never interested me. I think that it's nice that it's there for people who want it, but I never studied it. I don't know anything about that. I just did my own stuff. If it happens to be similar to other things that other people have done, fine. I can't help that. But it's not like I went to college to learn about all these people who did bitchin' stuff through the years and decided to go out and do that. That is not interesting to me. All I can say is, "Yeah, they're doing it right".
BM: You would agree with that method. You don't know why you wanted to create in that method. Is it because you wanted to say, "I'm a nice guy. I'll include you". Is there a democratic impulse there?
FZ: No. I think the jury's still out on democracy as a...
BM: Viable institution?
FZ: That's right. You know, I keep referring back to the book that I had when I was in high school in our civics class. It was called "Democracy: The American Experiment" and...
BM: We're still studying...
FZ: I think we're still experimenting and right now it looks like some of the ingredients they put in don't really work.
BM: People might ask, "Why the dog image?"
FZ: I don't even know how that got started. There are certain absurd things about a poodle as a species unto itself. What especially women have decided to do to poodles is probably something that if there were a big guy on the cloud who meted out punishment at the time of your demise, that there would be a lot of women that would be tortured forever in the Lake of Fire for things that they have decided to inflict on poodles. So, that's a pretty good metaphor there if you really think about...
BM: For perverse creativity?
FZ: No. Look, a poodle is born. It's got hair evenly distributed all over its small, piquant, canine-type body. Figure it out. They don't start looking weird until some woman decides that she wants to shape all that stuff to make it look like a walking shrubbery. Now, that tells you two things: that the dog's co-operative and that the woman's got some problems.
BM: The "mother of invention" has some problems. She's inventing.
FZ: Yeah, but did she invent something good? Do you think a partially denuded, small animal is good?
BM: It seems some people like it, so we have to allow them to have that choice or enjoyment.
FZ: Yeah, but doesn't the poodle have some rights here? I mean, we're trying to save the whales. They're stuck up there. There are three whales with their noses sticking out of a hole. Now the Russians want to send an ice-breaker. It's three hundred miles away, the Russians are going to save the whales. What about the poodles? Who's doing anything for the poodles?
BM: Right, save the poodles?
CD: Who's plucking the poodles?
FZ: What?

BM: Who's plucking the poodles? Who's plooking? Who's plucking? (all laughing). To me that's a symbol of your journalistic work of putting out information for Americans who are getting plooked and need to be...
FZ: Unplooked?
BM: Yeah.
FZ: I think they do need to be unplooked, but the problem with Americans is they have this self-image of "We're so nice, we're so fair, we're so honest, we always take the high road." If only it were true, this would be heaven on earth, but it's not true. And when you see two hundred and forty million people willingly deluding themselves with this idea that they're somehow God's chosen people, I find that to be a huge... Continental bad mental health is what it is.
BM: That's the "cheese" that you talked about in your Newsweek "editorial" they wouldn't print?
FZ: Yeah. How can we be so foolish as to think that we've got it all? We certainly don't. And anybody who ever travelled for twenty minutes and kept his eyes open must realize that no country has got everything. You just don't have it. The major deficiency in the United States seems to be that it's got a history that only goes back a couple of hundred years and that history itself is riddled with corruption, it is riddled with exploitation. You name it, we have exploited it and it's not exactly something to be proud of. If whatever we have achieved we had come by it honestly we'd be in a lot better shape, but really we haven't. We've abused a lot of people not only here in our own country but around the world, and then gone to church to smooth it over and had some guy say, "Yes, we're God's chosen people and this is our Manifest Destiny - to be the peacekeepers for the world". I wonder, with this aesthetic that they have in the United States, whether we don't have the right to inflict in on anybody else. I believe that we certainly don't have the right to inflict it. But even if we had the right, would that other person benefit from becoming more like us? Countries that have cultures that go back thousands and thousands of years, and we walk in and we want to give them Coca Cola. Why?
BM: You're speaking as an American Citizen. There would probably many people in other countries who feel that their fellow citizens are a bit deluded, too patriotic about their cultural values. So you're speaking as an American citizen.
FZ: Well, I think that the American situation is probably more critical than, say, the guy from Borneo who believes that we are where it's at. At least the guy from Borneo isn't going around doing some tricks in Central America and wherever else we've got little covert operations going on. He's not trying to inflict his values on another society. Whereas, especially through the missionary procedure coming out from the United States, we have spread the poison of our ignorance to other cultures, to the detriment of those cultures, almost since this place was founded. America was founded by the refuse of the religious fanatics of England, these undesirable elements that came over on the Mayflower. Ignorant, religious fanatics who land here, abuse the Indians, and then go to bed with a board down the middle, you know, the bundling board, so they don't have sex. That's how we got started. And when we think back to our Founding Fathers, they don't ever talk about the Founding Mothers. It might be a little bit too risque. They didn't want to have too much to do with them, anyway. Because what kind of a woman wants to take a ride on a wooden boat in the middle of winter, anyway? Not probably something you want to see in Playboy magazine. The way we got started and what we have turned into, and our desire to inflict it on other people all over the world, I think is a tragedy. And something big is going to happen in 1992 when Europe, if they can get their act together, if they can organize themselves the way that they are trying to do and kind of be the United States of Europe, as a consumer bloc and as a manufacturing bloc, is going to be larger than the United States. That's three hundred and thirty million people or something like that, that make products that work.

BM: Yes, and that is the impetus for "free trade". I think the Canadian businessmen know that they've got to get together with the United States to compete with this bloc that's coming up.
FZ: Well, here's the thing. What they make in Europe, those products seem to be more desirable than the products that are made elsewhere, except for Japan. Japan, as we all know, makes stuff that everybody wants.
BM: You mean now, on the world market, Europe's products are very desirable?
FZ: Yeah. And if the United States continues the way it's going, like thriving on rhetoric rather than on practical solutions, in four years when they've got their United States of Europe, we will have slid even further. And the United States is going to be in a very vulnerable position, even if it makes an alliance with Canada in order to make a large bloc, because the size of the bloc doesn't increase the quality of your product. It just means more people sharing the absence of trade barriers to buy more stuff from someplace else. Right now the United States is two hundred and forty million people dumb enough to buy anything that anybody sells them and smart enough not to buy their own stuff, O.K. And that is not something that you can continue for a century. You can't go for a hundred years just buying everybody else's stuff. Sooner or later you're going to have to redevelop the product base in the United States so that we buy our own stuff and that our commodities become valuable to people elsewhere. This trade imbalance is not a joke. It has long-range implications that could be very severe. And for every American that dreams of the American way of life and owning your own little home with the white picket fence and living next door to somebody who looks like Jimmy Stewart, they ain't going to get it.

Part 3

BM: I remember you talking a few years ago about the inability of Europe to come together - the tribal hostilities that go back centuries.
FZ: That's right.
BM: And you preferred the basic unity in America. That was a value you admired in Americans who are in the structure here. You are talking again as a citizen about the threat of what's going to happen in Europe. It may help you, might be good for you if you buy the products and it helps your musical apparatus but...
FZ: No, I didn't say either of those two things. I'm talking generally about the difference between Europe the way it is now, hacking it out with intertribal debates that have been going on for a couple of thousand years, and having the opportunity to blend some of that stuff together in 1992 to give that whole region the kind of cohesion that the United States would have under ideal conditions. I'm making a comment about that. And meanwhile, I would say that the reverse is happening in the United States. We are breaking up into regions. It's the North versus the South, and the East versus the West, very much in politics and every other thing. We're moving apart.
BM: I saw a book that came out a few years ago, "The Nine Nations of North America." It breaks it down like that, the different regions. And Marshall McLuhan predicted this fragmentation that would come to the United States and doom the United States to be a bunch of little bickering mini- states. You see that coming, also.
FZ: I see it. Let me tall you about another trend that I see as long as we're talking trends here. The amount of money that is generated by cocaine that flows directly into the hands of the cartels that make the cocaine is, right now, translating into political power. And over the next, say, twenty-five to fifty years will translate into even more political power for those people. They will transcend governments. Because there is something that I heard about last night, that I imagined could happen, and it turns out I was right. This friend of mine who's spent some time in Brazil verifies the fact that the cocaine cartels have gone into the worst slums in Brazil and played Robin Hood to the people there. They're giving them

cocaine profits to give them clothes and set up these little fiefdoms. Basically what they've created is an army of people who are willing to protect them. The police can't even go into those slums because they're at risk. Those slums are literally under the control of the guy from Colombia with a bag of money in his hand. Now as a test balloon, I would say what's happened in Rio with that would indicate to any good businessman, and I would presume that these cocaine guys are good businessmen, that that's the way to go. Think of every place in the world where you have an underclass - it's poor and it's being pushed down by the middleclass, directly above in the case of the United States, or the upper crust that does all their bad stuff. Who is going to take care of these people? In the United States you've got a homeless underclass that's developing that is unprecedented. If the cocaine cartel came into the United States and helped the homeless, what do you think would happen to the War on Drugs here? Playing Robin Hood is easy when you got that kind of a profit base. It is so peculiar to think about that and I predict that there is going to be more of that happening all over the world. It doesn't cost that much to give people a little something to eat and a little something to wear. When they've got nothing, anything looks good. You don't have to be a major benefactor - just give them a little present and you're a good guy.

BM: Two people who predicted that, too, were Mae Brussell and a person who is running for President of the United States, Lyndon LaRouche. He has mapped that out. His magazines are very good for charting these cocaine cartels. Would you support a President who wants to fight that trend or a Presidential candidate who's honest about that?

FZ: I certainly wouldn't support Lyndon LaRouche. I'll say that if he has information that backs up what I just heard from a guy who was down there, then I credit him for having at least one piece of good information. That seems a little better than saying that the Queen of England is involved in the drug traffic, which is another one of his favourite...

BM: That's the way the media present him. I've read his literature and he doesn't say that. He says that those old banking networks allow this laundering of dope money to happen through their banks and don't take action which he claims he would do.

FZ: Well, what he's done, he's taken some things which actually are facts and said them in a way that makes them sound ridiculous. Because of the banking laws in England it is possible that especially British banking concerns and British off-shore banking concerns have been deeply involved in money laundering. In fact, some of their branches set up in Miami are involved in it. We're just now beginning to see how this stuff works, but the other thing that ought to be said is that these people who make the billions from cocaine also finance right-wing governments. You know why? Because as long as the right-wing governments are in operation, their drugs are going to be illegal and as long as they're illegal, they're going to make more profits. It is so twisted.

BM: Like the pornography racket.

FZ: That's right.

BM: But what if LaRouche is taking on this issue? He's the only politician who's doing that. That's commendable, isn't it?

FZ: No. I wouldn't say that Lyndon LaRouche is commendable by any stretch of the imagination. I believe, although he hasn't been convicted yet, that the whole business with the credit cards and the rest of that scam, that's not commendable. That's the end justifies the means. That's not commendable.

BM: Right. But what if certain people have a control over the media and can distort the public's perception of LaRouche, and that there are even people infiltrating his organization to do the credit fraud because he's the only one taking on this most present, pressing problem that you predicted or that you see coming?

FZ: I don't think that he's really taking it on. I don't see him taking it on. I see him stating some facts that any trend spotter could state if you saw it. The way I arrived at it was: I just

start with the premise - follow the money. You know, the old Iran-Contra "follow the money". (Both laughing) Now, if somebody's got money, what do you do with it? Answer number one: you go for power. Now, where do you get the power? Power comes from might. The might is either going to be in large armaments or in large armies. Now, where's a man, with a buck in his hand to spend who wanted power, going to get an army? The answer is simple: any slum. And then, just by chance, last night I talked with this guy who had been in Brazil and he said that's what they're doing down there. O.K., why? Now, Lyndon LaRouche may see this same trend. I don't see Lyndon LaRouche out there fighting it. I see Lyndon LaRouche doing a credit card scam. That's what I see. If I had other information, I would see something else. I don't.
BM: But you're relying...
FZ: I've seen LaRouche on television. I've seen him being interviewed and he does not come across to me as a guy that I would trust at all. I don't buy Lyndon LaRouche.
BM: This is an example of a political concern of yours that you wrestle with daily that we talked about at the beginning of the interview. How much do you want to take on to deal with this trend? Do you have any personal strategies for stopping that or do you think that the force is so large there is little you could do?
FZ: The only way that I can see to reduce the influence of something that would behave like a government, cross international boundaries but not be a government in the sense that people elected it, the only way that you can reduce the influence of that creeping mess is to legalize the substances and cut their economic base. Now, let's talk about the drug problem. Drugs do not become a problem until the person who uses the drugs does something to you, or does something that would affect your life that you don't want to have happen to you, like an airline pilot who crashes because he was full of drugs. That's a drug problem. I believe that people have the right to commit suicide. You can stick a gun in your mouth. You can stick a needle in your arm. You can do whatever you want, but you own your own body. I think you do. Drugs become a problem when the person who uses them turns into an asshole, and they also become a problem when the person who manufactures and distributes them turns into a politician. That's the drug problem. Now, you want to fight the drug problem. You have to be realistic about what the problem is. The substance itself is not immoral. Without cocaine you're going to have a hell of a time at the dentist's office. You can't say, "We have to burn ever coca plant". Otherwise, no more Novocaine, buddy.
BM: The dental hygiene dilemma
FZ: Yeah. So there are things that you have to consider. There are the fine, little points. The problem is that the public gets saturated with the rhetoric about "just say no to drugs, there's a drug problem", and this and that and it puts it into a context where it becomes a moral menace. It's not a moral problem. It is an economic problem. It is a social problem. It is a mental health problem. And it can be a matter of physical danger to you when you have people who have life-and-death control over other people, who are users and they can endanger the life, like a physician, who might use drugs, who might give you the wrong kind of an operation. Or different ways the person who uses the chemical can fuck up your life. That's what you've got to look out for, but the substance itself is neither here nor there, and the person has as much right to drink a beer as he does to use the substance. The only difference is we have prohibition now of these certain substances. If you'll let your mind drift back to the time there was prohibition against alcohol, think of what happened. Remember: those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. Without Carry Nations, every Italian in the Mafia would be out of business right now. It was Carry Nations who put them into business. Because there was the law of supply and demand. People wanted to drink beer. They wanted to drink gin and a few guys say, "Hey, I don't care, I'm going to supply the demand", and they became billionaires. And they eventually found out and people got killed for years all during Prohibition. The machine gun was busy. People

were dying because they wanted a beer, and the government literally could not enforce the prohibition on alcohol. And in the time that they had this moral law to keep people from drinking alcohol, they managed to create the empire of organized crime. And the same thing is happening with cocaine. A guy in the jungle with a swami shirt on some place is going to wind up ruling half the world because somebody decided that cocaine was a moral problem. Cocaine used to be an ingredient in Coca Cola. Was it a moral problem then?
BM: That's well-spoken, and that distinguishes the difference between you and LaRouche because he thinks the solution is to continue banning them.
FZ: It won't work.
BM: And that feeds the problem. Yes, you've made that clear. I'd like to go into the satire you do. You emphasize and you're known for, a polyrhythmic approach to composing. I read a recent interview where you talked about working with harmonic, melodic and rhythmic elements, but in earlier interviews I've noticed you emphasizing the multirhythms, the polyrhythms. Do you see that society is hypnotized by a beat, by a rhythm, by a hypnosis that you feel that you can shake up with your polyrhythms?
FZ: It's real simple but real complicated at the same time. There are certain basic natural rhythms. How often does the moon become full? Once a month, O.K. That's a rhythm. When does the tide come in? When does it go out? That's a rhythm. What is your heartbeat rate? That's a rhythm. Call those natural rhythms. You don't think about them but they're there. There is also an average tempo at which people conduct their lives. That is a rhythm. If that average didn't exist, then people wouldn't know whether or not they were going fast or going slow because those are terms which are used to compare to an average. "I'm having a slow day". That means that you're behaving less than your imaginary average rhythm. "I'm really getting a lot done today". You're going faster than your imaginary average. Now, music, the way in which it connects with human behavior, takes into account the implications of these universal natural rhythms. Certain types of music reinforce them. Disco music, for example, is banging you over the head and reinforcing your factory rhythm. Anything that deviates from that reinforcement of your factory rhythm could be perceived as rhythmically dissonant. So, if you understand the whole idea of dissonance, dissonance when resolved is like having an itch and getting to scratch it. Dissonance when it's unresolved is like having a headache for life. So, the most interesting music as far as I'm concerned is music in which dissonance is created, sustained for the proper amount of time, and resolved and got your scratch and next case. So, the concept of dissonance in my work works on a lot of different levels. You can have rhythmic dissonance. Any rhythm which goes against the grain of a natural rhythm is going to be disturbing for the period at which the dissonance exists. But once you get back to that downbeat, you can then look back and say, "Hey, that was quite fascinating what happened there. I didn't know that you could squeeze all those beats into that one factory cycle". O.K. Same thing with harmony. Certain chords, when you hear them, it's like, "Ah, we're now relaxed because all the harmonics have lined up from here to there and it's all complete, and it's like a nice big C major chord". Like the drone that they give you in the New Age music that just makes your brain sit still. That's the reason it makes your brain sit still. It's like, it's all there, there's nothing else to do. It's done. Now, how long can you listen to that. A long time if you're closely related to a jellyfish. But if you, in that harmonic environment, include some irritating notes, notes which are not part of the harmonic structure, so long as the note then moves to one of the partials in that static chord - like certain notes want to move upward, some want to move downward, some can actually live in there at a lower volume and just be like a pollutant in the chord, giving texture to the chord. All that stuff is part of the skill of writing music. But unless you understand why you're doing it, and how long it lasts is very important too because it's only interesting for a certain period of time, then after that it's obnoxious. That's what I do when I put stuff

together. Same thing with words. You have to understand the overall concepts of natural rhythms, things which exist that people take for granted, and the idea that one can create an artificial irritation for a certain period of time to give a pleasurable sensation when it stops. It's like the kid banging himself with the hammer: "Why are you doing that" - "Because it feels good when I stop". And in medicine it's like people who want to be young again, they go in and get their face sand-blasted. That probably doesn't feel very good, but when it's all over, they look like Mick Jagger.
BM: I remember an interview you did for a television station in Toronto, the one where you, disguised as a journalist, asked Frank Zappa, "What do you really want to know?" And Frank Zappa answered, "What time is it?" Now, that is what you've just explained - the importance of timing, and time, and the model of the audience you're targeting, and what you're trying to create. So, that is what you want to know - what time it is.
FZ: I think that's what everybody wants to know if you get right down to it.
BM: You mean on the personal level? If they're going to "meet their Maker"?
FZ: No, I don't think people really give a shit about that unless they're completely bamboozled by religious superstition - to live your life in planning for this good time you're going to have in the sky. There are certain religions which emphasize that more than others. I believe the Mormons have this proposition where if you're a good Mormon man, your reward is you get to have your own planet and it will be populated with women who will do whatever you want them to do. Now, that's a strong incentive for a certain weak-minded man to join that religion.
BM: That must be Top Secret. I haven't hear that one.
FZ: You haven't heard that one? Well, there's a lot of good Mormon stuff. Did you know that caffeine is one of the big no-no's?
BM: Really?
FZ: You didn't know that? "Don't drink coffee". You can't drink Coca Cola or any of that kind of stuff. That was written in the Book until they bought into Coca Cola. And suddenly this one particular form of caffeine was O.K. and now Mormons get high on Coca Cola. That's their big thrill.
BM: What did you mean by "time" when you said everybody wants to know what time it is? What's the context of that statement?
FZ: This goes back to what I was just telling about the natural rhythms.
BM: You mean that's health, you're talking health.
FZ: Yeah, in a twisted way, sure it is health.
BM: O.K., then say it your way
FZ: No, I'm trying to see it that way.
BM: Like being comfortable.
FZ: You're comfortable when you are in phase with all of the rhythms. If you spend too much time moving too slow, you are out of phase with your factory rate, your factory set rhythm. You spend too much time moving too fast, you're out of phase with your factory rate. You have to spend a certain amount of time at rate.
BM: That's the consensus of the community, I guess, or the environment you're working in.
FZ: And also based on your own personal metabolism.
BM: You don't mean the factory you're working for?
FZ: No, factory rate is like a product that's set at the factory. They turn a little screw and then they put some stuff over it so they can't touch the screw anymore.. That's the factory set rate, the calibration.
BM: You're talking biology.
FZ: Your biological clock. Your personal clock as indicated by your personal chemistry as opposed to the phases of the moon, all the rest of the cycles that are going on. That's your

rate. Your biology versus the cosmology. You've become accustomed to that rate. You perform at a higher rate, at Olympic level, or at a lower rate, Quaalude level.
BM: Homeless level.
FZ: Right, whatever it is. If you're not at rate, you're uncomfortable.
BM: And that would cause disease
FZ: Rate is time. "What time is it?"
BM: But then you see how that relates to health because if you're comfortable and you're satisfying your different rate needs, you probably will be a more energetic, healthy person.
FZ: I don't know whether you're going to be more energetic, but people talk a lot about stress. That's a big media thing. Stress is the difference between your calibrated rate and another rate at which you are forced to perform.
BM: "One size fits all" and that causes stress.
FZ: I don't think so.
BM: Well, if you impose...
FZ: "One size fits all" means that the Universe is the one size. It fits all.
BM: Oh, I see. It's not imposed. It adapts to everything.
FZ: "Impose" is the wrong word. It exists and you can consider the Universe an imposition if you're truly arrogant, or you can just deal with it the way it is. Here, it's a universe of rates. You have molecular rates. You have large- scale rates. You have the expansion of the Universe rate. You have the rate of atomic decay. You have the rate of aging. You have all these rates. So, it's a world of rates, and rates are time. Just so you really understand it, the rate is the difference between when it starts and when it ends. That's the rate. These are cycles. A cycle is the way it goes up, the way it goes down. That's one cycle. You know, it's pretty consistent the way I look at stuff. But I seldom do interviews with people where they ask me about any of these kind of things. They usually want to know, "Well what about that Tipper Gore?"

Part 4

BM: Yeah, I haven't heard you explain the Big Note before. So it's coming out now because it's been evoked.
FZ: Well... "evoked" (laughs)
BM: Would you prefer to talk about these things more often?
FZ: No, I don't think you need to say them all the time. I think you need to say them once and then just have it out there, and then on to the next case. I don't think that it's something that anybody has to dwell on. I take these things as facts. I live my life using these facts as the guidepost to do my stuff. Somebody might hear me talking about the rates and think it was the weirdest, dumbest thing they ever heard in their life. I don't think that they are correct. I think that if they thought about it for while, they would see that there is some useful information in what I've just told you, but I've known this stuff for a long time and that's the way I do my work. That's just the way it works. I don't see how you can ignore the rates. You can't ignore time like that. Oh, the other thing that you have to realize is time doesn't start here and end over there. Everything happens all the time.
BM: Is that a fact?
FZ: That is a fact.
BM: All times, all cultures?
FZ: All time. Everything is happening all the time.
BM: Our futures are happening now?
FZ: And already happened before. Everything's happening all the time. The reason I can say that is time depends on the point from which you're looking at it. It only appears that things are transpiring because we are here. If we were someplace else, they would not have transpired yet. If you could move your point of reference to the event taking place,

you could change the way in which you perceive the event. So, if you could constantly change your location, you could live the idea that everything is happening all the time.
BM: People don't see themselves doing that.
FZ: That's too bad. But they could. I think that one day somebody's going to say, "Yeah, that's right." Now, if we take that as the basic premise, then time travel is no problem.
BM: Is that "discorporate"? Is that what you meant on WE'RE ONLY IN IT FOR THE MONEY?
FZ: No, "discorporate" is talking about not being part of the corporation. "Discorporate" normally means to leave your body, but in the sense of that song, remember it says "Unbind your mind, escape from the weight of your corporate logo".
BM: But that's leaving your body, your corporate body...
FZ: Your corpse.
BM: Yeah, your corpse. But now you're talking about moving through time. I've heard mystics talk about what you just said. You're saying that's a possibility. How could you demonstrate that?
FZ: You could demonstrate it if you were a really good mathematician, I'm sure, which I'm not. That is something that I just take on intuition. It seems to me that it is a fact, and I will behave accordingly that everything is happening all the time. And the only way that I could attempt to aim somebody in the direction to prove it is: when an event is taking place, it has a lot to do with the position of the observer, and so if the event as a fact of reality is to be discussed or dealt with, you must always remember that the perception of the event is a byproduct of the position from which the event was viewed, the position in time and space. If you could modify your position in time and space, then the event becomes something else. It becomes a future event, or it becomes a past event, depending on where you are. These are all relative descriptive factors which have nothing to do with the actual event. That's only words used to describe the event. So, if we can just hop out of the bullshit for a minute and imagine ourselves located someplace else observing the event, the mystic procedure of telling the future, and the rest of that stuff, looks a little bit easier just because a person was able to relocate their consciousness and perceive it from a different angle.
BM: During our break, you mentioned something about George Bush's campaign?
FZ: The thing about Bush is, if in fact he has won the election, then why is he still campaigning. And, if in fact he has won the election, then wasn't there a payment of forty-six million dollars that was either made to him, or split between him and Dukakis, which is part of that fund where everybody checks off a dollar on their income tax - all this campaign money. If he's won the election, then why is he still spending that money? Shouldn't he give it back? I think that if he insists on spending that money, then he's committing some kind of a fraud.
BM: Did you see the movie called Cover Up?
FZ: Yeah, I saw it.
BM: Barbara Honeeger is interviewed in it, but she was on a local L.A. radio station and she mentioned some forty million dollars. She also had on this former CIA man who phoned in and revealed a lot of Bush's skeletons. Did you hear that?
FZ: No.
BM: They talked about some forty million dollars. Are you talking about that?
FZ: No, this is not secret money. This is from the government. This is the straight-ahead matching funds that the government handed over to both candidates just a little while ago, and the number I recall was forty-six million. And I don't know whether it was forty-six for both, split down the middle, or whether it was forty-six to Bush. But whatever it is, if he's already won, then he shouldn't go out and throw his granddaughter up in the air like we see him doing in the commercials. You know, get off the campaign trail, get out of the flag factory.

BM: But the election hasn't happened. He hasn't won yet.
FZ: That's right. So, let us bear that in mind.
BM: You mean the polls, the "pollstergeists".
FZ: Yeah, the "pollstergeists". That's right.
BM: But there are so many people who would express that view. They're quite fed up with the polls. There's a massive sense of frustration.
FZ: The people who are fed up with the polls are the people who are already smart enough to see through the bullshit to begin with. The people who are bamboozled by the polls are the ones that are most likely to vote for Bush. It's the whole idea that Americans think a winner is so terrific, and if you put the little winner's crown on one guy before the election, the day after the election, you want to make sure you voted for the guy who won. Because when you talk to your buddies when they slap each other on the back drinking Miller Lite in the bar after the election, you want to have been on the team. And that's part of the peer pressure to move the votes around.
BM: But there always seems to be candidates for that level of humanity. Do you expect your criticism could wake one of them up?
FZ: The criticism won't, but in order to motivate the people who are already susceptible to that sort of bamboozlement, you have to provide them with data through another way. You have to either do it through a metaphor or you really have to draw them a picture. They have to be persuaded. They can't work on the logical level. You can't just say, "Look, here are facts". Because those people have gone beyond the medium of fact retention or fact processing. They're "feelies". Everything that motivates them must be wearing warm and fuzzy clothing. They want to have that warm, fuzzy sensation that whatever it is that you're selling to them makes them even warmer and fuzzier. But it can be done. In order to do it, you need to have access to media so that the message can be presented properly. The problem is that the whole myth of the liberal media bias is preposterous because nobody who owns a broadcast license, or a newspaper, is a Democrat. They're all screaming on the right. And the flap about liberal media bias was manufactured by the right wing. The right wing goes to some of their friends in another part of the right wing and says, "You attack my network. You say that CBS is too liberal, and that gives us the license to behave more conservatively in order to appear to be fair". Thereby pushing any liberal idea completely out of their broadcast, and doing it in a way that's saying, "We're doing this to provide balance". Perfect fakeout. Because that's exactly what the people always wanted to do to begin with. The demise of the Red Lion Decision guaranteeing equal time for opposing points of view in a political situation - they got rid of that last year, or the year before. Most people don't even know that regulation doesn't exist anymore. It is no longer required of a broadcaster to give equal time to the opposition. And so the removal of that regulation, combined with the desire to have only one point of view presented to the American public, has given them this great opportunity in this election.
BM: Of course, it is important that you say this, but how much do you wrestle with the stupidity of those who do not respond to these facts?
FZ: I make a distinction between ignorance, stupidity and idiocy. And fortunately we have an abundance of all three in the United States.
BM: 'Unfortunately"?
FZ: Both.
BM: "Fortunately and unfortunately".
FZ: That's right, because if you can understand all three specimens, you can communicate with them. You talk to a dog a different way than you talk to a cat, which is a different way than you talk to a goldfish. You have to understand that they do exist, and if you have to communicate with people who are in any one of those levels, or not in those levels, you have to find the language that gets the point across. The difficulty is not inventing the language, the difficulty is finding the medium by which to disseminate the language

because a person such as myself does not have access to media. You can't. I tried to get a television show. You saw what happened. There's no way in the world they were going to let me on the air. And I believe, based on a conversation that I had with Michael King, the guy who runs KingWorld, here's how these guys think: For those of you who don't know, KingWorld is a syndicator that does Wheel of Fortune, Jeopardy!, and Oprah Winfrey. They make an enormous amount of money. Basically, this man earns his living by providing an alternative to the news because the shows that he puts on the air are things that people watch when they don't want to watch the news. So he's made hundreds of millions of dollars by giving people an alternative to the news. We had a conversation in a restaurant about six months ago. He really didn't like Jesse Jackson, and I don't like Jesse Jackson either, but I said, "Jesse is such a huckster he ought to have his own television show. Give Jesse a talk show". And for a minute the cash register went off in this guy's mind, you know, Jesse Jackson with a talk show. Then he immediately said, "No way, I won't give the man a forum". And as much as they like money, and as much as he knew that if Jesse Jackson had a T.V. talk show he would have high rating, this guy wouldn't put Jesse on the air because he didn't want to give him a forum. And I have a feeling that that same conversation was repeated in certain ways when the topic of my talk show was brought up at networks. So, the problem is not how to say it, it's how you get what you're going to say into the ear of the person who needs to hear it. That's the trick.
BM: Did you want to categorize the three levels?
FZ: Oh, what makes the difference? Well, "ignorance" means you simply were never provided with the information. So a person could be smart and ignorant at the same time. He could be smart in every other aspect of his life, but ignorant of certain types of information. "Stupid" means you have the information but because of some...
BM: Perceptual deficiency?
FZ: Yeah, because of some personal inefficiency, you decide to perform an act which contravenes what you know. You do a stupid thing. Like, you know that you spent all the money in your budget, but still you had to buy that purse. Then that's stupid. You get away with it for a while, but it's stupid. "Idiot" I would think more in a medical sense. The person is capable of performing acts which could harm other individual because he is chemically stupid. There's something in the guy's brain. It's a mental health situation, whatever it is, but you don't want the guy flying your plane for you, or driving your bus, or writing your law. Now, we have all these. Then we have the people who are marginally rational. They pride themselves on having a certain amount of logic, and they have a certain size data base, they have a certain function to perform in society, but they won't go all the way. They won't believe in the facts to the point where they can carry it through to a truly logical conclusion. That means, at the critical point, they're going to opt for the easy way out. They can see what the real answer is, but they won't go for it because they just can't be bothered.
BM: Yeah. Now, that's a different kind of inefficiency.
FZ: Yeah. But see...
BM: That's a laziness or something.
FZ: Yeah, that's right. And that's more of a tragedy because those people know what's right. They have the mental equipment and they have the data base to do the right thing, and they don't.
BM: Have you thought about what the causes of that holding back are?
FZ: It's a combination of institutionalized fear which is one of the major subtexts of American society right now. You feed people "Wooh, we're gonna worry about this" and it's a lot of worry that is sold to you as a subtext in all of your advertisements and...
BM: Stress.
FZ: Stress and dread. There are people that have had their stress level artificially raised by advertising. And, at the point that happens, a certain piece of machinery in the logical

part of the brain shuts down, and they've been tricked into believing that they are a creature other than what they are. They become the targeted audience of the advertiser. They've mutated into that, and all they would have to do is turn that part of the brain back on and they'd be free of that. They'd say, "Come on, what is this?"
BM: It's hard to explain why they get susceptible to that.
FZ: You have to break down the sub-categories of the dread. I wish there was a way to graph this out, but advertising is very powerful, and in order for advertising to work, it works on a non-logical, subconscious, psychological level. And to induce people to buy things they don't need for reasons which are not there, they have to trick you. And they trick you with colours, they trick you with modifying the cutting rate of the commercial which then modifies the way in which you ingest the data. They do tricks, and part of what's involved in the data that they are tricking you into consuming is this built-in dread factor: "You can fail. Someone will laugh at you. You are impotent. You will be poor. You will die!" Various flavours of dread, they're lurking in there in different combinations, and, of course, after they've shown you the dread, they show you the light at the end of the tunnel: "Our product will allow you not to die. You will not have pain. These little yellow pills, this really works. Our car goes fast and it's red. You'll get a blowjob if you drive this!" That's all built in there, O.K. So, people have been conditioned to consuming the dread factor. They don't know they're getting the dread, but it's in there. And then the answer to their problems - a product. So, they're trading dollars to avoid the dread, and the dollars will be aimed in the direction of the product that solves this imaginary problem. Now, how many people do you know can look at a television commercial and analyse what is really going on there. Most people don't even bother to watch the spots. It's tricking them without their even knowing it.
BM: Did you learn a lot about that when you were in advertising in your early twenties?
FZ: No.
BM: Did you know that before, or did you figure it out with what you went through?
FZ: The first clues that I had to this were from a book called "The Hidden Persuaders" by Vance Packard which I read a long, long time ago.
BM: That was in high school because it came out in the Fifties, I think? But you read it when you were quite young?
FZ: Yeah. I was in high school in the Fifties. I'm forty seven.
BM: So, Packard turned you on to some of that stuff.
FZ: Yeah, but not what I"m telling you right now because the advertising was mutated into something different in the Eighties than it was in the Fifties, the whole technique.
BM: Because many societal changes have happened. So, there's a different context, right?
FZ: It's not just the context. It's the style. Well, the flavour of the dread has changed. The types of things that people are afraid of have changed to some degree. Certain basics remain. Death is a constant. Impotence is a constant. Poverty is a constant. But at certain times in American history, certain things become more important than others With the growth of the Yuppie culture, the fear of impoverishment and people laughing at you is probably more dreadful than death or impotence. So, that particular type of dread would be stressed more in a 1980's commercial than it would in another era.
BM: Would you say that the Yuppie culture was a natural product of the Hippie culture?
FZ: I don't know whether it's natural, but I can see that there's a logical continuum because the Hippie culture was not anything divine to begin with. Most of the people who joined that were just chumps looking for a good time just like the people who become Yuppies. The reason they join any kind of a movement, or a culture, is because they're looking for a home, they want to belong to something. Now, a lot of the people who became Hippies, maybe they knew that they didn't look good in Paisley and long hair, with joints dangling out of their mouth. Maybe they knew that was stupid, but they did it anyway because that

was the only way they were going to get a blowjob that season. Now the Yuppies have gone beyond that. They have to have a Rolex, they have to have a Porsche, but they don't even care about the blowjob anymore because it's just about the dollars. Now, that's a mutation.

Part 5

BM: A "United Mutation"? The collective consensus? I'm reminded of the saying, "Advertising creates the disease and then offers the cure".
FZ: Well, that's just like the way sell you pornography legislation.
BM: And the drug thing. So, this is an elaboration what you mean to say, "The Emperor isn't wearing any clothes".
FZ: That's right.
BM: These subconscious factors wouldn't work if one knew that the Emperor was wearing no clothes.
FZ: Here's a way to make it obvious. It's just like the PMRC talking about explicit lyrics and harming children. If a kid doesn't know what a blowjob is, you can talk about blowjobs for weeks and he isn't going to be affected in any way about that. Unless he knows what you're talking about, how's the lyric going to register? It's the same way if you're using the word "parsec" too many times in a sentence. Unless the person knows what it refers to, where's the harm? What good is the data?
BM: Don't they feel that the kids know too soon, now?
FZ: When is "too soon"? There's a certain mentality that presumes that sex must be something truly horrible, and that we must be protected from it at all costs, especially our tender, precious, young children. And there is a difference between knowing about sex, knowing how it functions and having, let's say, in the case of child pornography, an adult abusing a child. That is a violent crime. It has more to do with violence than it has to do with sex.
BM: Sex is a means of controlling people, but it also is a very important thing, and a lot of emotions come out of sex.
FZ: The way a right wing administration would view sex is: "Sex is a cheap thrill. Now, we can't have these people having too many thrills because usually after they have sex, they're happy. Unless they're really doing it wrong, they had a good time. Now, that relieves the dread". If you just had good sex, you're not going to sit around there and think about that dread they tried to instill in you. That's one of the antidotes to the dread factor. So, the less sex, the more dread, the more dread, the more sales, the more sales, the more GNP. Then you have what they call this "prosperity which we must continue for another administration". The other thing that happens, when you deny people sex, is they have a force inside their body that wants to be expressed, it wants to come out. You're either going to do it through sex or you're going to do it through murder. You're going to find some way to get that out of you. Now, these right-wing guys would prefer you had a nation of potential murderers because that makes for a great army. Whereas you don't want a nation of people who do good sex because what have you got then? They're having a good time. You can't sell them that Wacky Wallwalker if they're in a good mood.
BM: But what about sexual hygiene? In other words, you could have good sex with one partner, but people get confused. They think that they want to have sex with more than one person. They get more greedy, then the hygienic problem comes in.
FZ: Come on, that's a matter of sex education. Someone ought to tell you to wash you're private parts every once in a while.
BM: Yeah, but people are stupid.

FZ: We, the American people are not physically incapable of being taught how to wash their private parts, or why. I think we have the ability to process this particular piece of information. So, the hygiene question - I don't know, people are not that stupid.
BM: But you know people are stupid on many levels, and the people who are protective babysitters in religion and government, so to speak, they take advantage of the stupidity to control, but people are generally inconsiderate. So, there would be this chaotic transition period, which is maybe what we're in now, where people are not following the leader's positions, or there's a mood of autonomy, and yet they create a lot of mistakes from it and bad side-effects because they don't know how to be intelligent.
FZ: That's a big problem - where people don't know how to be intelligent. One of the reasons that they don't know is because it's never been fashionable to be intelligent, especially in the United States. This country has an anti- intellectual history that goes back to the first bundling board. You know, thinking is bad for you. AS a matter of fact, you can trace it back to the beginning of Christian doctrine. The whole foundation of Christianity is based on the idea that intellectualism is the work of the Devil. Remember the apple on the tree? O.K., it was the Tree of Knowledge. "You eat this apple, you're going to be as smart as God. We can't have that". Let's get one thing straight. Besides the Universe being just a matter of rates, and I don't want to get back into that, but the behavior of molecules is a matter of rates. And molecules, translated into the real world where we can deal with it on a regular basis, move into the realm of chemistry, and so it is with intelligence. I think it has a lot to do with chemical processes that take place in your brain. I think you can make people artificially stupid. Quaaludes is a good example. It's a chemical way of producing stupid behavior, and conversely, there must be a way chemically to make people perform better. I don't know what it is. But if there are chemical substances which people will willingly ingest to produce stupid behavior, one day somebody will come up with something that will make it possible for you to think better. I'm not talking about LSD, but some other way that'll just allow you to improve your processing capabilities. Just like when we were talking about the difference between the original Apple computer, where you have to wait ten minutes for the thing to go clonk, clonk and see a few words on the screen, and stuff that is available on the marketplace now that is a thousand times faster. It's doing the same job. It's just doing it in a more efficient way. So, when Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, if you go for all these fairy tales, that "evil" woman convinced the man to eat the apple, but the apple came from the Tree of Knowledge. And the punishment that was then handed down, the woman gets to bleed and the guy's got to go to work, is the result of a man desiring, because his woman suggested that it would be a good idea, that he get all the knowledge that was supposedly the property and domain of God. So, that right away sets up Christianity as an anti-intellectual religion. You never want to be that smart. If you're a woman, it's going to be running down your leg, and if you're a guy, you're going to be in the salt mines for the rest of your life. So, just be a dumb fuck and you'll all go to heaven. That's the subtext of Christianity.
BM: Earlier, just before you were talking about the Tree of Knowledge, you were speaking about having some chemical means of making people smarter. I think of the...
FZ: Maybe it's an apple.
BM: Yeah, the Apple computer. The text of the booklet in UNCLE MEAT, back in '69, was about taking Ruben and the Jets and the "vocal drone mechanism", and using sounds that made vegetables grow better, and animals. Were you getting metaphorically at what you were just talking about - your vision of seeing that we could be optimistic because someday they're going to make people better, maybe with sound?
FZ: Why not with sound? Because the largest organ in the human body, correct me if I'm wrong, is your skin, and your eardrum is only part of your skin, folks. So, that may be the most sensitive part of the skin. But I believe the whole skin responds to sound, and different parts of the skin over different parts of the body have different resonant

frequencies. In other words, frequencies that strike them better. Because of the size of the eardrum, it has a center frequency susceptibility at around 2K. That's why telephones sound like telephones. Your ear is most sensitive around 2 kilohertz. It can hear other things, but that's the real sensitive range. So, maybe other larger patches of skin resonate with other different frequencies. There's been research done that showed that certain frequencies of certain amplitudes produce physical effects. Ten cycles of a certain amplitude stops your heart. You can die from sound. You wouldn't even "hear" the ten cycles, in the traditional sense of the word, because your ear doesn't go down that low, but a couple of good boops and you're dead. And there are frequencies that will make you piss, and frequencies that will make you shit, and frequencies that will make you do all kinds of things. I don't think they've discerned the entire range of them, but there is a connection between human organism and the way moving air molecules affect that organism. So, we shouldn't be so short-sighted as to rule out the possibility that therapies for different kinds of conditions, as well as the ability to kill people, could all be induced by sound. And the clue to that might be the soothing effect that certain types of music have on certain individuals. And the trick is, what passes for nice music in one culture, is radically different than nice music in another culture. I doubt seriously that most Americans would find it soothing to listen to six hours of Chinese music, but I don't think that the Chinese would find it too soothing to listen to six hours of Barry Manilow, either. So, each culture has a different ideal of what constitutes good music. But the thing that is existing in music, that transcends the style, the orchestration, or the timbre of the music, is the pitches of the notes. So that may be the determining factor.

BM: Yeah, that's interesting. There is an idea that Marshall McLuhan tossed around - that music was speech slowed down. And he said that the reason cultures have different musical tastes is intimately connected to language. So, obviously the rhythms of Chinese music are connected to the way they speak, and that determines a large part of...

FZ: It's not the rhythm. The thing that sets the Chinese music apart, the rhythms of Chinese music are similar to the rhythms of the other musics, is the timbre of it. It's the texture of the thing.

BM: Oh, this is what you mean by "pitch".

FZ: No, timbre is the texture of a sound quality. In other words, is it being played by a snare drum? Is it being played by an oboe? Is it being played by a tuba? That's the timbre. The pitch is the vibrational frequency of the note being played no matter what instrument is playing it. That's pitch. Rhythm is the rate, the period, the distance between one note and another. That constitues the rhythm. And the harmony is - there's an implied or explicit harmonic domain in which all the action takes place. It's like the canvas on which everything happens. The same melody line, with a major chord supporting it, is a different story when a minor chord is supporting it. The message that comes through is different. So, that's how the things interact. Harmony tells you how to perceive the melody. That's the compass that shows you which way North is. The rhythm determines how fast the piece is going. So, you can determine whether or not the piece is above your factory rate. Or the rhythm determines the distance, the periodicity between one start time and another of each of the pitches in the melody line. That's how it's interacting. And the timbre is going to send your message about certain other qualities of the line. For example, the dumbest example of all time is: "Purple Haze" played on an accordion is a different story than "Purple Haze" on a fuzztone guitar. You play exactly the same notes, but there's two different messages. So, one of the main differences, culturally, from place to place, in the music, is in the timbre of the instruments which are playing the music. Chinese music, to use an extreme example, has certain types of flues, certain types of little, stringed instruments, and little, bowed instruments that have a certain nasal quality to them which would not be an admired texture in a Western society. But to the Chinese that is their music and it's perfect, and it's wonderful, and they think that's the way things ought to be.

Whereas we in America think that Bruce Springsteen. is the next best thing to Michael Jackson.
BM: When I said rhythm before I would include all those factors, but did you say earlier that pitch may be the key for making people intelligent through sound?
FZ: No, I'm not saying "making people intelligent". I'm saying if we allow ourselves to consider the possibility of audio being used as a tool for therapy, really what you are doing is using certain frequencies aimed at certain parts of the body in order to set up a resonance. In other words, you can knock down a bridge with the right resonance because you'll find a resonant frequency of the concrete that's holding it up, and it's going to crack. And the same thing could be true of a crystalline situation in the human body. If you want to crack it, you've got to find the resonant frequency of that crystal, and then it's gone. Like the right note could be a cure for gout where you have uric acid crystals located in the joint someplace. How are you going to get in there? The guy can't move his joint anymore because the crystals have kept his joint from moving. So, you find the right frequency, aim it at it, turn up the volume, and they're gone.
BM: I'm sure some people have explored this. Do you know, Carolyn?
Carolyn Dean: Yeah, that's Radionics.
FZ: Yeah?
CD: Yeah, there are different things. Medically, there are gallstone-shattering devices with ultrasound.
FZ: Oh yeah.
CD: But there are Radionics machines that measure the frequencies of all the organs. If the frequency is not normal, you can plug in the normal frequency and "kick" it. So that's being done.
FZ: Well, see?
BM: I remember, according to Miles, that you used to have on your basement studio door the words "Dr. Zurkon", back in 1970.
FZ: It's possible, yeah.
BM: Because there I see you incorporating several roles. Your talking about healing that was brought out on the UNCLE MEAT album. You touched on it, and it doesn't show up too much in other records. But this relates to something you said at the end of the Rolling Stone interview in 1968. I think they asked you, "Anything more to say?", and you brought up this: If one is being tried, you should be tried by your peer group. In other words, you addressed the legal world then, and you're addressing the medical world here. Do you see that you're using music in many roles other than just as a specialist of music?
FZ: Well, I think you're blowing it out of proportion. The fact is that I"m a guy who has an operating brain. I"m in the process constantly of bringing in data, and sorting it, and drawing conclusions. You do an interview with me, I deliver to you today's conclusions. If you happen to ask the right question about something that I've thought about, I'll give you what my up-to-the-minute take is on any given conclusion on any given topic at that point. To me, it's fun. It's not like I have a mission to go out and help the medical profession or the legal profession. I think about different things. And the reason why I would be triggered to think about the thing would be that I might see a news story, or somebody might say something , and it doesn't just go by me. I think about it. I think about my environment. So, I don't have any choice, that's just the way I am. I can't turn it off. So, if I come up with a conclusion, and somebody asks me a question about certain topics, then I'm going to give you my conclusion rather than text book knowledge. I didn't learn my shit from reading a book. I would have gone to college, I couldn't have done any better.
BM: Yeah. So, where I'm maybe a bit limited here is trying to project a certain strategy of the theatrical element.
FZ: Well, let me talk about that peer group business, because when you talk about what the Constitution provides, a trial by a jury of your peers, I would say that would be one of

the most precious commodities that a person can obtain in the United States today. Because the people who are available to sit on a jury anymore are not peers of anyone. How do you get a fair trial, and especially if complicated technical matters, when your peers are not your peers? Who's Ivan Boesky's peers? What do they do?
BM: David Rockefeller.
FZ: Yeah. In theory, for him to get a fair trial, he would have had to have a jury of his peers. Where are they? And even more grotesque, where are Charles Manson's peers?
BM: Then it doesn't make sense, the idea of being tried by your peers.
FZ: On the one hand, if you want to stick to what the Constitution says and treat it with some respect, and at least go along with the idea of democracy, then you ought to live by the letter of the law. If you find out the law is no good, then you ought to change the goddamn thing, or live a lie.
BM: One of the problems in Canada is that the medical profession keeps the trial by their peers "in house".
FZ: But that happens everywhere though. It's very seldom that a guy who is in the medical profession in the United States really gets into a civil court because there's other ways to hush up his case through the AMA. And the AMA is certainly nothing to brag about. They got caught with that little scam that they tried to pull against the chiropractors recently. Look, nobody's perfect. People have invented certain rules to attempt to give the illusion the world works. Some of the rules are good, some of them are not. The biggest problem that we have in American government today is when a problem is realized, and they are popping up every day. We're just beginning to see the start of this legacy of the Industrial Revolution which is the ruination of health and ecology on a global scale. That's the price you're going to pay for all the evil shit that happened at the beginning of the century. Now as the stuff comes up, instead of dealing with it in practical ways, there are attempts made to legislate the event away, legislate the problem. The trick about legislation is no matter how you write the law, you've got to enforce it. And I'll be kind, ninety percent of the laws that have been passed recently in the U.S. Congress are unenforceable. They're either unenforceable, from a practical standpoint, because it can't be done, or unenforceable because it might be done but nobody in his right mind would be willing to spend the money to actually make the enforcement possible. And the new drug bill is one of those things. You can't really enforce it. There's not enough police, there's not enough jails, there's not enough courts, there's not enough judges, juries, anything to implement what's written in that bill. And the same holds true of just about everything else that comes out of Congress. We would be better off in this country if we would spend four years, one whole administration, ridding ourselves of useless laws that don't work.
BM: And lawyers. That's where you get...
FZ: That's right. That's the problem. These laws exist to create work for lawyers. The contemporary society has gotten so complicated that you could be violating a law without even knowing it. That's the whole idea of JOE'S GARAGE - the criminalization of America. You are still responsible for your actions. You can still be called a criminal even if you didn't know that the law was there. So, who can know? There is no one person in the United States right now who will stand up and swear that he understands the U.S. tax code. It's too complicated, and if you take that on a state-by-state basis and think of the body of law that exists on the books in every state in the U.S., compounded by federal law, compounded by case law, then you are totally at the mercy of a legal system that could perhaps even have you killed for violating something you didn't even know existed. I believe there are still some states that have the death penalty for oral copulation - New Jersey, North Dakota.

Part 6

BM: What are the "Nine Types of Industrial Pollution"? Because it seems these old institutions are running amuck with these old techniques, and they're out of control. They clash with different media, different institutions, and different professions.
FZ: The funny thing about that song title is that, at the time that it was put on UNCLE MEAT, there was no such thing as a concern over industrial pollution. It hadn't even been brought up as a topic. I put that on that song just as a joke after driving through New Jersey.
BM: So, there were not nine, you had not categorized...
FZ: Here I could see nine on that one trip. There may be more.
BM: The term was not in the regular media...
FZ: No.
BM: But one of the institutes involved in the C.I.A.'s MKULTRA mind-control program, and this was in '55, was called the Human Ecology Society. They were using the term "ecology", but it was "human" ecology - perhaps in a management sense, not as pollution.
FZ: Human engineering.
BM: Yeah. But I don't know if I got that clearly. Do you want peer group trial? Or are you pointing out that there are no peer groups possible?
FZ: I'm pointing out an idiosyncrasy of the law. You want it, make it work. If it won't work, then you're living a lie if you keep it on the books. And that's only one.
BM: It would be useful to respond to your demand and change, but there's an element in your suggestion of the absurdity of the situation, right?
FZ: Of course. You have to look at the situation and see what's really going on here. You have thwarted ideal, you have somebody designing an ideal situation. And through history you see that it doesn't work and then, instead of dealing with it because it doesn't work, you have people living a lie. And living a lie creates stress.
BM: And humor. Pointing it out creates laughter which helps relieve stress so...
FZ: Yeah, but it doesn't solve the problem. It's like popping a pimple.
BM: But this is like the human intelligence factor we were talking about. There's a catch-22 element here. You're pointing out the lie. Do you expect people to be able to apply the suggestion, or would you ask them to do it?
FZ: What I'm asking people to do is simply this: In your own way, in your own life, every day, you are confronted with a piece of data. Don't just eat it up. Just think about it for a minute. You have the right to process your own information based on the equipment that you were born with. That's your right. That's real freedom. You have the right to make up your own mind. Now, if you choose to numb yourself, and to be bamboozled, you have the right to be bamboozled. But in your state of bamboozlement, you do not have the right to be a liability, because of your self-imposed ignorance, on other people who might want to do things the right way. If you voluntarily choose to be a numbskull, for whatever reason you have chosen it, that's fine. You have the right to be stupid, but you don't have the right to harm other people as a result of your stupidity. And you don't have the right to legislated your stupidity into existence, to force it on other people who have a clearer view of what things are.
BM: Do you think that one man, a President with a wise cabinet, could implement some changes, or is the society so complex that that institution, within the checks and balances system, would not be able to implement change?
FZ: I think it's possible, sure. The reason that it's possible is nobody has more access to the media than the President. And most of the evils of society can, in fact, be cured through information. We have a society that has been disinformed and based on the disinformation has made irrational choices. And that's what I mean by "ignorance". People, who ordinarily might be smart, are deprived of the data by which to make a rational decision, don't have the data to do it. Nobody has got more control, or access to the media, than the White House Press Office. We've seen it. They've literally reshaped

American history to their own ends. It truly is 1984: "Black is white, white is black, 2 and 2 is eleven", whatever they want to tell you. "George Bush is an ecology guy. Ronald Reagan is a great patriot. Nancy wants you to say no to drugs, and she likes to say yes to the extra clothes that come in"
BM: See the power of the information of the situation we're in? And your mini-manifesto, which we talked about at the beginning, begins with the work "Information".
FZ: That's right, you have to be suspicious of the information. That's why it says, "Information is not knowledge and knowledge is not wisdom".
BM: What is "Information"
FZ: Any data that comes in. Somebody presents you with something. Like, I walk up to you and say, "Two and two is eleven". That's some information. It's bad information, but it's information. O.K. Now, if somebody comes up to you and says "Two and two is eleven", and they have the Presidential Seal on their coat, and they got bunting waving in the background, and balloons go up, you might consider it for a minute. So, that's information. Information is not knowledge. Knowledge is the point at which you know something, O.K. Now, wisdom is the idea that you have a bank of facts. To behave wisely, you have to deploy those facts in some way. You can deploy them stupidly or you can deploy them wisely. So, information is not knowledge. Knowledge is not wisdom. Wisdom is not truth. You can take all the sorted pieces of information which gives you a knowledge base. You can act in what you believe is a wise procedure, but that is not necessarily any ultimate truth. And just because something is an ultimate truth doesn't mean it's beautiful. And just because something is beautiful certainly doesn't mean you have to love it. Because there's lots of ugly stuff that you could love, too. I mean, I love my dog. Not a particularly attractive dog, but that's a wonderful dog.
BM: How did it continue after Beauty? What are the rest of the lines?
FZ: Oh, well, it's: "Information is not knowledge, Knowledge is not wisdom, Wisdom is not truth, Truth is not beauty, Beauty is not love, and Love is not music. Music is THE BEST"
BM: If "Love is not music", what is "Love"?
FZ: It's chemical, merely chemical.
BM: And it can be...
FZ: Chocolate induced.
BM: And you have different rates of duration?
FZ: It can have different frequencies. There are many notes that you could call B flat. There are several of them on the piano. They're all called B flat, but they're all different rates. But they're still called B flat for some reason. Because they're multiples of the same rate.
BM: It seems that in your studies in music, in your experience as a musician, you've seen that as a model for many other parts of human activity. And it serves to see music as chemistry, and you can take the smattering of chemical knowledge you got in high school and you adapt it to the musical metaphor, to the Big Note metaphor.
FZ: Well, things work together. I see the Universe as an interrelated thing, not so much as one big enormously complicated thing, but one big simple motherfucker. It's rates. There it is.
BM: There was a quote in an obscure fashion magazine about 1970 where you said, "Waves come together, they cancel each other out, the there's no time". Something along those lines, if I recall correctly.
FZ: I don't remember saying it, but I know what I'm talking about. Alright, there is such a thing as frequency cancellation. I don't think you can ever get it to be a hundred percent, but you can reduce the amplitude, how loud something is, by causing the waves to cancel each other out. That's one of the ways that they use to reduce the hum in air conditioning. By introducing a tone into the air conditioning duct, which counteracts the low frequency

hum, the waves cancel each other out. Now, if waves are time and you cancel the wave, then what have you just done?
BM: We've covered a lot of things that I wanted to talk about. Now, here are some miscellaneous topics. I noticed in various interviews that the phrase "no comment" would come up. And in one of them, back in '76, in some rock magazine, you were asked about psychic phenomena, being psychic. You answered, "No comment". Is there a reason why you would say "no comment"?
FZ: Yeah, because that's based usually on the person I'm talking to.
BM: You mean, you don't think there is information that you would give in response to that question?
FZ: Sometimes there are certain people who can't understand what you're saying.
BM: So, "no comment" means it's a reflection on the person you're dealing with.
FZ: Yeah.
BM: And I noticed in other interviews, this may be the same reason, when someone starts talking about '50's R&B, you'll say, "Now, you're moving into dangerous territory there".
FZ: One of the reasons for it is, most of the people who talk about '50's R&B don't have any recollection of it. If you're talking to somebody who wasn't alive during the Fifties, then all they know about '50's R&B is the Sha Na Na television show, or Happy Days. They don't know what it was so I would rather not discuss it with them. If I can talk to somebody in my own age bracket who knows what the thing is, then fine. But you can't really have a conversation about that style of music with anybody who doesn't comprehend it because of the damage that's been done by the commercialization of it. That's all.
BM: But when you say "dangerous territory" you're saying, "Buddy, you better know what you're talking about if we're going to explore it, because you will get..."
FZ: Well, I say that facetiously. I"m not threatening anybody.
BM: But it's "dangerous" because it's so little known today.
FZ: Yeah, there's just no comprehension of it. There are certain types of music that have been ruined by media exposure. For example, what do we really know about Mozart. They made a movie about him and there are so many Mozart records, but what is that? That ain't what Mozart was. Can we know? And by the same token, can we really understand the mentality that went into producing Doo-wop records unless you knew what that world was? I think we got maybe about a six- month turn-over for each musical interest-cycle now, at the this point in the Eighties. Whoever was the big hit six months ago - "O.K, next!" It's got nothing to do with the quality of what the person did, or what the music is about. It's not new so you don't want it. With that sort of mentality working in the marketplace, how can you address a musical marketplace with that mindset about something that has to be totally irrelevant to them. This is so many interest- cycles ago that why trouble them with descriptions of Doo-wop music.
BM: And that brings in the time factor for consumers in the sense that we live almost 200 years every twelve months in terms of trend turn-over, or possibilities for interest- cycles.
FZ: Yeah, and I think they're becoming shorter. I've also talked about the End of the World being a question of whether it's going to be by fire, ice, paperwork, or nostalgia. And there's a good chance that it's going to be nostalgia because the distance between the event and the nostalgia for the even has gotten shorter and shorter and shorter with each nostalgia cycle. So, projecting into the future, you could get to a point where you would take a step and be so nostalgic for that point where you would take a step and be so nostalgic for that step you just took that you would literally freeze in your tracks to experience the nostalgia of the last step, or the last word, or your last whatever. The world just comes to a halt - remembering.
BM: That was McLuhan's point. He said that the electric environment creates such a turn-over of information retrieval and projection that whole societies would turn to "stone". Which I see as the reason why people are getting supposedly "conservative". They're just

freezing in their "time zone", but there's an underlying paradox because they are also turning over these cycles faster.
FZ: That's perverting the concept of what conservatism is. True conservatism is the guy who wants smaller government and lower taxes, and that's me. And everything else that has been appliqued on to that term has more to do with religious fanaticism and Fascist politics, and stuff like that. "Conservative" is the wrong word. I don't think that Americans, in the way they think of themselves as being nice, kind, free, fair, good-natured, jolly little individuals, would willingly opt for Fascism, but they could easily be tricked into it. All you have to do is tell them that it's a candy apple, or whatever the lies are that are going on right now. Literally, they are being molded into something that is as potentially dangerous to the rest of the world as Nazi Germany was in the Thirties and Forties. But tricked into it by people who have just lulled them into this false sense of security, and they wave a little American flag over it and everybody just has this knee-jerk reaction that they've got to buy it.
BM: Well, it occurs to me, when you'[re talking about nostalgia cycles, that may be why people have the desire to end the election as soon as possible. They can't keep their interest on the two-year campaign like they used to.
FZ: I don't know whether anybody truly wants to be interested in a campaign for two years, and I think that's one of the reasons why they run them for two years. Because they want to numb the electorate. They want to keep the voter turn-out low. If you keep the voter turn-out low, then you realize that the only people who have managed to stay interested long enough have to be weird. The average guy, who just wants to exercise his democratic right to vote, he's so turned off by the whole thing. He's seen these guys over and over, he's heard the lies, he's looked at it and just gone "Yuck!" And now it's not a privilege to vote. It's a horrible obligation and they don't even want to know about it. And especially when you tell them that the election's already over, then why should they bother? Why should they leave their job or go, especially on the East Coast when it's cold, to someplace in November to pull a handle or poke a hole in a piece of paper? Who cares? The election's over. They want you to believe that.
BM: Isn't this a major disservice caused by the television age? And if humanists or conservatives were really concerned, they'd say, "We've got to turn off this electric environment" as one of the means to attempting to solve all their problems.
FZ: You can't. You have to use it. You can't just turn it off. I think that the electric environment could be one of the greatest boons to mankind if it were run by people who had mankind's interest at heart, but there's not an ounce of that. There's no benevolence in the network I guarantee you.
BM: I'm reminded of a quote you made back in the late Sixties: "If you really want to change society, infiltrate the military". Do you want to elaborate on that? Is that obvious? Do you think anybody would do that?
FZ: I don't think that any of the people who have let's say, humanistic concerns ever took me up on that one. Because the military is something that is never going to be dismantled as long as people are in their current state of evolutionary development. They still believe in the need for war. And I believe that it is impossible to do away with the military, from a practical standpoint, just because there are people on this planet, who are less sophisticated than ourselves, who would be more than happy to do harm to us. So, you have to be able to protect yourself against it. However, to do a good job, you should do it efficiently. You should know what you're doing. Cut the bullshit and go do it, you know? I like to see people who are not bullshit people in positions where they make decisions. People who have more of a long- range view. you need people in every profession, and the military is a profession, who have a long-range view. What is today's little action going to mean twenty-five years down the road? And why are we doing it? Is Grenada really necessary? Is Central America really necessary? Is Angola really necessary? What are we

really doing? That's what I mean by telling people to go into the military. Because it is not my field of expertise, but I'm convinced that the law of averages would indicate that somewhere out there, there's somebody, who has an aptitude for military thinking, who's also a long-range thinker and who might care more about people than about rhetoric and politics. The military should be an organization which performs a service for the rest of the society just like a police force. As long as you need it, it should be reminded that it is working for the rest of the citizenry. These are people who have been given a license to carry a gun and kill people with it, and they should not use that against the citizens which gave them the license. They should always act in the interest of the citizens that gave them permission to behave in the militaristic way.
BM: So, you're saying that in the late Sixties you made that proposal and nobody responded to it, or said, "I'm going to do it, Frank."
FZ: Well, they never called me up and said, "Good idea, Frank! I'm going in now. Thanks for suggesting it". None of that kind of feedback. But I'll tell you one of the other things that I suggested, and it's been twisted and really turned around, and it turned out to be really true even though it was twisted and turned around. I also suggested we could make the world better by going into media, which is exactly the reason why Falwell and Robertson have these colleges to train people to go into media. They're going to use the same thing to put their clones in place to keep the lid on stuff, and they're out there. There was a guy who graduated from Robertson's University who was working at Fox Television Network on the Joan Rivers Show. They're out there, they're already in place. These are like moles. You don't know that they came from that brainwash camp, but if you're talking about a Christian Lord, you're talking about doing the work of an imaginary deity that wants to keep people stupid. That's the job. So, these are people who ultimately, when they are in place, will keep "content" from managing to get into the airwaves.

Part 7

BM: In the Sixties, you know that you could use the media and inspire people, or have them do it, but the odds were against it. I see that you're saying now in the Eighties, "Look, the people who don't have your interests in mind have done what I urged many years ago". And you replay that by saying, "Get out and vote." That's the first level. How could you begin to implement what you see as intelligent people into influential positions?
FZ: I wouldn't. I think that if a person is truly intelligent, then they're going to find their own way, and they don't need me to tell them what to do.
BM: Then why do you make such statements? Just to remind people?
FZ: I hope that there are some people, who are just teetering on the brink of being consciously intelligent, who will opt for it, rather than opt for the Quaalude life. If you've got the chemical machinery in your body, which is a functioning brain, and you have free will, then you can choose to be stupid or you can choose to be smart. I say choose to be smart. It ain't as bad as you think. The problem is most people choose to be stupid because there's a social stigma attached to being smart. If you're smart, you don't get laid. That's something every kid learns in school. The other thing that used to be true, it's not so true anymore, is nobody wants to fuck a comedian. Now it's different, a little bit. That used to be an axiom. Nobody wants to fuck a mad scientist either. So, Americans have steered themselves away from intellectual pursuits because they want to have a social life. And the ones that have been the most victimized by it are the women who have made themselves stupid. I think there's probably a lot of smart women in the United States. If we trace it all the way back to Eve, who was smart enough to suggest that that idiot man eat that damn apple, obviously she knew something that he didn't know. She knew the apple was something worthwhile. Now, the guy's been blaming her for all this time: "Now you want me to go buy your Kotex for you". But women are pathetic when they make themselves

stupid. There's even more of a stigma to being a smart girl than there is to being a smart guy.
BM: You talk a lot about sex and say you're a devout pagan. Is it your strategy to say, "Look, I'm a smart guy and I get laid"?
FZ: Well, that is absolutely a fact. There you have it.
BM: It can be done.
FZ: It can be done.
BM: Did you get laid much in high school, or were you interested in that at that point?
FZ: Being a normal American teenager, I was very interested in it, and I was truly blessed that I had a teenage girlfriend who lived three doors away from me. So, yeah, I was having a wonderful time in high school.
BM: She's not the woman you first married?
FZ: No, I didn't meet her until I was in junior college. And eventually the girl that I was going out with in high school, her parents decided that we shouldn't be so serious and they moved away so that I couldn't see her anymore.
BM: But you were sexually involved?
FZ: Yeah.
BM: And you used condoms?
FZ: No.
BM: You were careful?
FZ: Well, this is something that I believe is not germane to our philosophical conversation.
BM: O.K. Another quote relating to people working in their institutions. And I think you set an example: you engaged yourself with the music Establishment, and kept your integrity, and did your part. And you're hoping that people in the military are infiltrating and getting to positions that can implement some positive changes.
FZ: Do your part. Pull your weight. Don't be a flake.
BM: I have here a quote where you said "you were interested enough in politics to talk to people about it". And you said that in the late Sixties. Now, many people though in the Sixties, probably because of the way you were presented by the media, that you were very arrogant.
FZ: I think one of the techniques used to neutralize a person who has intelligence is to make them out to be a bad guy. And I"m not a bad guy, but I think that what's been written about me in print has basically been designed to make me less appealing to a broad spectrum of the American public. It's the same syndrome as why I don't have a talk show on television. They don't want to give me a forum.
BM: Here's a question about the word "questions". I remember in Newsweek, back in '68 they did an article on you and you said, "My role is to ask questions". And then in the liner notes on the GRAND WAZOO album, you talk about the "Questions" who come out and get checked for musical talent, and then if they pass, they can go do a couple of simple musical exercises giving some rudimentary entertainment skill. But the ones that do not pass get dumped or drowned in the "UnDifferentiated Tissue".
FZ: The word "Questions" used in that story was instead of "Christians". The original name of that song was "Eat that Christian".
BM: Is that right?
FZ: Yeah.
BM: Why did you change it?
FZ: I thought "Question" was better.
BM: Because it applies to other points, too?
FZ: Yeah, it's a more twisted concept - "Eat that Question".
BM: Or multi-leveled. I think you sometimes criticize excessive verbality or talking without thinking, and sometimes instrumentals or pure sound can massage away that concern about verbal concepts.

FZ: yeah, I think a lot of people just like to talk , and they think what they have to say is really fascinating and they take as long as they can to say it. It's not always possible, because some of the stuff that people ask me is pretty ridiculous, but I want to find the quickest way to boil it down and give an answer that you could remember, if you could remember the question. Sometimes the questions are six weeks long, but just to bring the answer down to a manageable chunk, it's tricky to do it. It's the kind of thing that would be easier to do if you were writing it down on paper, but to me that's the most boring thing in life.
BM: Well, your strategy is so appropriate for an electric technology when you're given thirty seconds to get your point across.
FZ: That's a challenge. Try it sometime.
BM: I do it, or try to do it, on the radio every week. So you ask musical questions?
FZ: yeah.
BM: I remember in an interview around the late Seventies, you brought up the concept of "sprechstimme", a German term.
FZ: A speech-song. That means, instead of singing all the pitches of the song, you half speak it, you half sing it. It's a technique that was attributed to Schoenberg who used it in a piece called "Pierrot Lunaire". And the way it was written was: all the pitches for the soprano to sing, the ones that she was supposed to half speak, had X's on the stems. But I don't think he invented it because this is a type of vocal styling that has been used in Blues. It's also been used in other types of ethnic music. You can find it in Bulgarian music where, instead of exactly singing the note, you imply the pitch of the note, but you're really talking it. It's in between.
BM: You started doing your talking stuff around that time when you were talking about that concept?
FZ: The first album had "sprechstimme" on it.
BM: Yeah. Now you related it to musical theory and thought, and you thought that you have solved some musical questions there in modern theory.
FZ: I would have to see the context of the interview that you're talking about. I mean, you know more about my interviews than I do.
BM: (laughing) I apologize, I apologize.
FZ: That's O.K. I remember some of them and other ones I don't for example, you used that Rolling Stone ('68) interview several times. I always thought that was a terrible interview. It bore little or no resemblance to what I actually said, and I was horrified when it came out because it was virtually mutilated.
BM: yeah, that's something we've talked about before. A long time ago, after I had mentioned some printed quotes, you told me, "I did not say that." That really happens a lot in your own personal experience.
FZ: Sure. I received something in the mail yesterday that I couldn't believe. In fact, Gerald, if you could go upstairs and ask Gail if she's got that newspaper clipping from Minneapolis, from a paper called New Reality. in this article there's a guy talking about the fact that I knew that Andy Warhol was murdered, and had some knowledge about Divine's suicide, and all this stuff. Did you see that?
Gerald Fialka: We get calls on Pumpkin, one a week. This guy's been doing this in Minneapolis for a while, and they try to connect, and I say, "There is no connection".
FZ: It's a porno paper. It's not even a real newspaper. It's got ads for bondage and stuff in it. And here's this guy making references to me knowing something about the supposed murder of Andy Warhol, and something to do with Divine, and a few paragraphs later, mine and my daughter's foot fetish, and all this stuff. It's just the most bizarre stuff. So, I laughed it off. But, you talk about things that appear in print with my name connected to it. I'm not to be held wholly responsible for what's out there.

BM: So, that's like mental pornography, this gossip and rumor. In this society of information overload, people can get away with a lot of bullshit.
FZ: Sure. Just because that's in print, somebody's going to say, "Well, there must be something to it. Otherwise, he wouldn't have written it. Otherwise, somebody would go after it"
BM: Yeah, there's a cop for everything.
FZ: That's right. "They'd get him if it wasn't true".
BM: There's where the naivete is, and maybe that's why people are so hypnotized by father images. Because they said, "Well, things are so out of control, we need a tough guy". I mean, this could be a disservice of the television age bringing...
FZ: Anybody who looks at George Bush and sees a tough guy has really been mediated.
BM: "Mediated" - don't they call in the "mediators" during the strikes? That relates to the media.
FZ: Well, they're "mediating" in the strike, really.
BM: Yeah, they give press conferences.
FZ: That's right.
BM: We've talked about this earlier, the confusion, the difficulty to communicate in this mass hallucination that's going on. You said once, "Information about my private life serves no purpose". But then music is an extension of yourself. I guess it's obvious that what you make as music does not relate to what time you go to bed.
FZ: I think that's irrelevant because the part of me that people should be most interested in, if they have any interest in me at all, is what I do. Not how I do it, or who I am, or whatever, because I provide a service for them. Whatever the information is I put out there, if it's useful to you, then great. If it entertains you, then great. That's what I do. That's my relationship to the outside world. Other than that, the world has no license to participate in my family life or anything like that. It's none of their business. But one of the things I attempt to do is: as I've said,k there is quite a bit of me in the music, but the me that I put in the music is the part of me that I think people would find entertaining. Nobody wants to know about my toothache. They don't want to know about my personal traumas and tragedies. Who gives a shit about that stuff? You want that kind of stuff? Go listen to a sensitive singer-songwriter with an acoustical guitar in his hand.
BM: Yeah, there are people who want that kind of stuff who identify their own problems with the...
FZ: That's right. Well, I don't want you to identity with my problems. I want you to identify with the conclusions that I've come to that might be something you would agree with.
BM: Actually, collective problems.
FZ: Yeah.
BM: Public problems. I come to this next quote. You once said, 'The media is all their is'. And you must have to wrestle with the fact that we have this informational diversity on many levels, but it's controlled at the money making level. They control who's going to be the millionaires.
FZ: Yeah.
BM: There's an incredible amount of information going out to the point that people can hallucinate and write ridiculous things in a little press...
FZ: That's why I've said, Information is not knowledge". O.K.
BM: But the conclusion...
FZ: Even I appreciate the opportunity to receive an extra piece of information which will help me to determine the veracity of another piece of information I have received. I want to hear a second and third source. I want to check it out. And unless you do check out a second and third source, then you are going to be badly served by the deluge of information that is presented to you because most of it is not reliable. It's bullshit.
BM: But then a lot of the sources contradict each other.

FZ: That's right. And what you have to do is investigate the contradictions and draw your own conclusions about where the action is.
BM: And in that information flood, I can see the phrase "the medium is the message" helps you point out that there's a technical effect that's going in, aside from all the confetti or baby powder that's getting in your face through all the different media as information.
FZ: Yeah. You have to understand that the medium that brings you the message taints the message. It spins the message. In other words, the same factoid presented on CNN, if you took that same piece of data and put it in USA Today, as opposed to the Wall Street Journal or the Journal of The American Medical Association or the Encyclopedia Britannica. Now, if the same factoid was everywhere, which one would you say would reinforce all the rest of them? If the thing is in the Encyclopedia, it looks a little more like a real fact than it does if it's on CNN. CNN is really not a reliable source of news. It's a fountain of disinformation. It is probably the most biased, most spin-encrusted, totally unreliable source of information that you can lay your eyes on, but I watch it all the time because it gives me a great thing to compare other stuff to. And most people don't do that. Most people won't compare. They'll just hear the news report and buy it right away and it's done. It's plugged into their memory bank, and when it's time to process information, that's the erroneous fact that they're operating on. Like people who have absorbed the latest polls, when it's time to figure out what they're going to do about the election, they're saturated with polls to tell them that all is lost.
BM: In your work with "xenochrony", are you satirizing editing, the way you put things together, besides the technical innovation of doing it?
FZ: "Xenochrony" means strange synchronizations. Am I satirizing editing? I don't know whether the technical process of editing is enough of a commonly understood phenomenon that you could satirize it. You can't made a joke about something that people don't know exists. So, I would say that's not part of it.
BM: How would you relate "xenochrony" to the time/rate thing we discussed earlier?
FZ: Well, a classic "xenochrony" piece would be "Rubber Shirt", which is a song on the SHEIK YERBOUTI album. It takes a drum set part that was added to a song at one tempo. The drummer was instructed to play along with this one particular thing in a certain time signature, eleven-four, and that drum set part was extracted like a little piece of DNA from that master tape and put over here into this little cubicle. And then the bass part, which was designed to play along with another song at another speed, another rate in another time signature, four-four, that was removed from that master tape and put over here, and then the two were sandwiched together. And so the musical result is the result of two musicians, who were never in the same room at the same time, playing at two different rates in two different moods for two different purposes, when blended together, yielding a third result which is musical and synchronizes in a strange way. That's xenochrony. And I've done that on a number of tracks.
BM: What is the idea behind that? Or is it just an interesting sound?
FZ: What is the idea behind it? Suppose you were a composer and you had the idea that you wanted to have a drum set playing expressively and intuitively, eleven-four, at a certain temper while an electric bass player is doing exactly the same thing in another tempo in another time signature, and you want them to do this live on stage and get a good performance. You won't get it. You can't. You can ask for it, but it won't happen. There's only one way to hear that, and that's to do what I did. I put two pieces of tape together.
Gerald Fialka: Do you realize it by chance though? Or do you say "I'm going to try this"?
FZ: That's what I do every day. I'm going to try this, and the stuff that works you keep and the stuff that doesn't you throw it away. I thought that one worked. That's why it's on the record.

Part 8

BM: Where I get the idea part is, I remember you did an interview in the L.A. Free Press in the summer of '69 and you mentioned Pauline Oliveri's work with sound, above the audible and below, creating a mass, and you liked that idea.
FZ: Not that it created a mass. It created something audible. It produced a sum indifference tone which happened to be located within the audible frequency range. By combining something so high you couldn't hear it and something so low you couldn't hear it, it yielded something in the middle that you could hear. Whether or not you like what you hear in the middle is another question. The concept is brilliant.
BM: Yeah, because it showed you how physical reality is, or the way it is, right?
FZ: It's one aspect of it.
BM: Are there other aspects you could talk about?
FZ: If you buy the idea that the vibrational rates translate into matter, and then if you understand the concept of vibrational rates above perception and below perception combining to create a reality, that opens up the door to some pretty science-fiction matter possibilities. If you can create an audible reality by a sine wave above the range of what your ear can hear and another one from below, and you put them together and suddenly it creates something that your ear can detect, is it not possible that solid matter of an unknown origin could manifest periodically because of frequencies of some unknown nature above and below which, for short duration's, manifest solid objects? It could explain a lot of strange things that people see.
BM: UFO's come to mind immediately.
FZ: Yeah.
BM: There's much in the Theosophical literature, in the mystical literature, and the mediumistic literature that says that's the way reality is, and they hoick that up as an explanation, but science traditionally doesn't buy that.
FZ: I don't approach any of this stuff from a mystical standpoint. I'm not a mumbo-jumbo guy. I think that there are physical realities and most of them are not understood. Part of the reason why science moves so slow is because many of the people who do science and who receive grants have to be "conservative" individuals in order to receive the money to do the research. And people who can convince a foundation, or a funding source, that they are conservative enough not to squander the money are not really the best guys or gals to do science. Give me some Tesla's, bring out some Tesla's here. Give me some maniacs. Let's just try it and see what happens. That's the way you're going to get stuff to happen. The other criteria by which people are funded is whether or not the end result of the research will yield something that explodes or kills. If you can convince a funding organization that you have a new way to kill, and you are conservative and won't squander the money, you can be in the science business.
BM: So much of what you say is common sense and what people have said a lot, maybe through history. But since World War Two, there have been a lot of books written and movements come up, and nobody seems to have the staying power to apply it in a practical way. They get lost in the ideal of "this is the way it should be", and then fumble when given the opportunity, or don't even know the odds they're up against.
FZ: Well, another thing you have to remember about all science and all art: it is impossible if you're starving to death. Society has to reach a point where you can be self-sustaining to the point where your basic physical needs are taken care of so you can allow your brain to think about stuff like art and science. That's why artists and scientists have to keep their eye on the economy. Because if things get tough, they can't do their shit anymore.
BM: Scientists and artists?
FZ: Yeah.
BM: So, that's another warning.

FZ: Because as the economy declines, the willingness of people who control cash to spend for research on things other than stuff that kills... basically it has to kill you or you're not going to get any money for it. For every cure for something, implied in it is: withholding the cure causes death. So, basically, if you want to be a large-scale murderer, you can clean up. Occasionally, when times are good, they'll fund something else - by accident, who knows how it happens? ? But when times are tough those projects never get a buck and actually research departments close down. You can't afford to run them anymore so the only thing that's left is weapons. And once you build a weapon, what are you going to do? You gotta use the weapon. And the thing has to have planned obsolescence so you can update the weapon. It's the spare parts contract that's really the thing that all these defense guys are interested in. Everything wears out. They're not going to run these new weapons in a test environment. They're going to be in the desert. Dirt will get in there. Gotta sell them some more camshafts. Whatever it is, they're looking at long-range economic benefits from building a weapon. And in order to use something that kills people, you have to have a reason to kill people - a war. If not a war, a regional conflict, a small war. AT very least you have to single out somebody to be an enemy and you have to direct your national interest to the destruction of the enemy. Now, we've been going along for years with Communism. Only it's not working so well anymore because the Communist just did some ju-jitsu. They're becoming Capitalists. And what the fuck is going to happen then? Who are we going to go after then? This is a big worry.
CD: The public.
FZ: I think that is very true. The public. That is absolutely true. Look, this new drug law creates the position of Drug Czar, but the amendment to the drug law is this pornography bill. Did you know that?
BM: No.
FZ: You didn't know that?
BM: I haven't heard it.
FZ: At the last minute they attach this anti-pornography rider to the drug bill. This is to go after people that they claim have been long-time purveyors of obscene material. And what it provides is that, just as in the drug bill, if a guy has a yacht and he's using it to run cocaine, they can confiscate the yacht. Let's say you were in the record business and you had been a long-time purveyor of obscene material, they can confiscate all of your property. This goes back twenty years. It's a twenty-year retroactive bill.
BM: When was that implemented?
FZ: Yesterday.
BM: When was it discussed? You mean, it was made a law yesterday?
FZ: Look, you know about the drug bill. They've been diddling with this thing for quite some time, but on the side... I actually saw the debate on C-Span. I think the thing was drafted by Strom Thurmond and rammed through by Orrin Hatch. They first tried to attach it to some child care bill.
BM: This is earlier this year?
FZ: This is within the last month.
BM: Really?
FZ: Yes.
BM: O.K. I've been on vacation for this past month. I've missed this.
FZ: Congress is trying to shut down, they all want to go home and campaign. And they're trying to crank out all this legislation. So, yesterday it was announced on CNN that they had attached this amendment to the drug bill in order not to have a mutiny by the conservatives in the Congress. So, all the Democrats went along with it and allowed them to paste this. The drug bill is bad enough, but they've pasted this other thing onto it. So, the drug bill allows for the creation of a Drug Czar. Can there be a Porno Obscenities Czar coming up within a matter of moments if they actually make this a law? I think the whole

thing is unconstitutional, but before you can take it to the Supreme Court for a test case, you know Reagan will sign this thing. It'll be on the books, they'll be out there enforcing it and then there will be a test case that will go to the Supreme Court. Now, if they delay it long enough to go to the Supreme Court, they're going to have all right-wing judges on there. They're going to uphold the law and what you will have at that point is the machinery that the Nazis would have loved to have had in place at the beginning of their career. This offers the legal right to stamp out any kind of intellectual activity because there's no legal definition of obscenity. You can't really nail it down. And any person can claim that something is obscene. Here's another thing it allows for: Not only the confiscation of property, but it allows for prosecution of the person making it, the person shipping it, and the person receiving it. You don't even have to buy it. If you received it, you can be subject to this law. It is the most broadly written, nefarious piece of legislation I have ever heard.
BM: And it was made law yesterday, October 20.
FZ: I don't think it's been signed into law yet. I believe that they announced that the porno amendment was attached to the drug bill yesterday. I believe there's still some discussion. But I have no doubt that it stands a very good chance of getting through, partly because a lot of the people in the Congress have already gone home to campaign, and they're not even there to vote on it. And you know the conservatives are going to be there to vote on it because it's the Fascist dream come true.
BM: : How did you put your biography together? I understand you have this other writer.
FZ: Well, there's a sad, sad story. In January, before the tour, we're rehearsing, and I had this obligation with Simon and Schuster to do the book and I'd been putting it off. And while we were rehearsing, we'd rehearse from two in the afternoon until one o'clock in the morning, and from one until six A.M. for three weeks, every night I would sit here with this guy and do taped interviews. And we'd just talk about whatever we wanted to talk about, and then he went away and had it transcribed and changed it from the way I talked into book talk. And when he sent it back, I hated it. So, when I finished the tour, I went in and rewrote it. I just took advantage of what he had collated, but I put it back into my own words. So, it's not like "as told to". It's not exactly like one of those kinds of things. It really has more to do with the way I write and the way I talk than it would have.
BM: So, it's better that he screwed it up because you didn't have the time before.
FZ: That's right. I mean, I was forced to do it. The result, I thought, was so bland that I couldn't possibly have my name on it. No way. I don't care what they were going to pay me for it. There was no way. I just had to force myself to sit for six weeks in this little room up there and type a book.
BM: That was July-August?
FZ: Yeah.
BM: Well, I'm glad that happened because when I had heard about this guy Peter Occhiogrosso doing it, I said, "Oh, well, it's going to be filtered through him". But it's not. That's much better.
FZ: It's much better. It's got some funny stuff, and there is at least three chapters that I wrote from scratch that never even went to tape. Because some of the stuff is so complicated, there's no way to take it off a tape. If you convert a conversation into the type of data that had to be in the book, there's no way to say it precisely without writing it from scratch, and that's what I tried to do.
BM: If you had written a book and said, "Hey, publish this", they might not have done it. It had to go through the book Establishment, the book industry connections.
FZ: Not necessarily because Simon and Schuster would have loved for me to have agreed right away to write the book. I'm the one who said, "Look, I don't want to write a book".
BM: Oh, is that right?
FZ: I'm happy to have the money, but...
BM: They were interested in what you had to say in your own words?

FZ: This particular editor was, yeah. She thought there was a market for it, not that she didn't give a fuck what I'm saying. Based on some of the things that she wanted to take out of the book, I don't really believe there's any deep- seated understanding of what the contents are, but she saw it as a merchandising winner. She thinks she can sell them, and they're going to have it in paperback sitting in airports before the end of the year.
BM: And there will be a lot of political information in it?
FZ: There's not so much information as my attitudes toward certain things. There's a whole chapter on conservatism. There's another chapter on religion. There's a long chapter on the PMRC and all the unreleased data about that. A lot of stuff about music. Just all different topics.
BM: What I was trying to think of earlier was your emphasis on chemical terms to point out that music is "food." I mean, maybe that was an attitude in the Forties and Fifties. There was this lofty ethereal approach to art, and your...
FZ: What's lofty and ethereal about that? I mean chemistry is real.
BM: No, that's what I'm saying. That you brought in the chemical, physical metaphors, in a scientific sense. Being like a scientist approaching sound and music.
FZ: I got that from Varese. He was moving in that direction, too. He was the first clue that I had to that type of thinking.
BM: That was when you were young?
FZ: Yeah, fifteen.
BM: That's interesting. McLuhan once said, "Science is moving closer to Art, and Art is moving closer to Science". One could maybe project different meanings for those things, but your music moved towards physical metaphors.
FZ: I don't know whether I would buy "Science is moving closer to Art". I think Science is moving closer to weaponry and Art is moving closer to commercialism. And never the twain shall meet.
BM: Yeah, but in your work, you're trying to make a point with this science, these vibrations, and talk of physics, talk of sound acoustics, bringing that into the musical - the dialogue of composition in there.
FZ: Yeah, the point is not to be mystical, or to be anything, other than to create a vocabulary wherein essential things that work in music can be described in a way that a person who deals in hard science can understand it.
BM: So, you're trying to help the scientists get a little...?
FZ: No, because they don't care about music. Scientists care about science, but it goes back to Egyptian religion, alright. In ancient Egypt, in order for you to go to heaven, you couldn't get there unless you knew the name of everything on the way to heaven. Did you know that?
BM: No, I didn't know that, said that way.
FZ: Well, here's what you had to know: you had to know the name of the doorstep or you couldn't walk over the doorstep. You had to know the name of each of the stones that you walked on, the name of everything because you had to ask permission to pass. Can you imagine living your life learning the names of everything you had to know in order to be dead and get to heaven. Now that's a religion! But the importance of naming things correctly is something that shouldn't be underestimated. Semantics should be more important to contemporary society. You have to give things+ the right name. If you're going to communicate verbally, you have to have the right word to tell what it's about. Now, I don't think that it benefits anyone to call a shoe a "banana". It could be poetic, but this is a shoe. Alright, I'm working in a musical, technical medium because the music I make involves machines of a scientific nature. And I have to create for myself a vocabulary, good, bad or indifferent, that allows me to deal with the topics of the data that I have to manipulate to do what I do. If I were working in a purely acoustic medium and on a simpler level, I wouldn't have this problem, but I'm straddling two worlds here. I'm straddling the

world of electronics, in some cases advanced electronics, and the old-fashioned world of putting notes together to make a composition, and there's no off-the-shelf vocabulary that you can use to do that. And at the point where you see that there are physical similarities in the behavior of the way the composition will work and the behavior of the way the electrons will be working in the electronic gear, or whatever, if you see that, why not state it. You should say it, and once you've said it, you should use it in your everyday work. You should make it part of your reality. Now, I don't think that most of what I do is useful to other people in terms of this vocabulary, or in terms of the concepts, because they'll never use them. It's useless, but you asked the question and that's where it is.
BM: Adam got control, according to the Bible, over the animals by naming them.
FZ: Really? They got that from the Egyptians.
BM: Yeah.
FZ: You see, I'm not a Bible scholar. I had enough Bible when they sent me to the catechism classes when I was a Catholic, and all I know is he was full of dread. It's a religion that's based on fear and punishment and loathing. The whole Catholic version of what the Bible says and what it does is quite a bit different than the way the Fundamentalist Christians deal with it. So, I wouldn't consider myself to be conversant with the bulk of the stuff.
BM: I think it was during that interview where you were talking about the speech-song, "sprechstimme", you were saying you had solved some musical problems. Who had those musical questions? Did Varese have them?
FZ: No, questions that I have to answer for myself. These are questions about how you get the point across. And oftentimes I've just appropriated the speech-song. When a person sings a word, the idea that is transmitted transcends the word because there's so much other data connected with the word at pitch. Understand?
BM: Are you talking about sound?
FZ: No, the person hearing, receiving the data, is not only receiving the word.
BM: The "meaning"?
FZ: That's right, the text of the word. He is also receiving the pitch data at which it is sung. In other words, that same word sung at a high pitch means something different than the word sung at a low pitch. He is receiving the data of the harmonic climate in which the word exists. He's also receiving the data of the relationship of the pitch of the word to the climate itself. In other words, if you have an A minor chord and the word is sung on a B, then that word is going to stick out because it's not part of the chord. There are three notes in an A minor chord - A, C, E. If you sing that word on any of the notes which are part of the chord, it recedes into the chord. It's part of the background. If the word is sung on a note which is not part of the chord, it steps out from the chord and draws attention to itself and becomes a matter of emphasis. These are the types of extra data that exist when you sing a word. An extra spin gets put on the word if you half say it, half sing it. It makes it even more 3D. It leaps out from the harmonic support and draws even more attention to itself if you've been singing along and you hear this melody and you get to this certain part and you half sing it, half say it. And it sticks out even further if you absolutely say it because it's incongruous in the setting.
CD: Well, that's probably activating both sides of your brain at the same time.
FZ: I don't know about that stuff. I don't know about left side/right side stuff. I'm not sure that I even buy the theory of it. To me, it sounds simplistic.
CD: But the music supposedly goes into your right brain and the spoken word goes into your left brain.
FZ: I don't know enough about the research that leads people to draw that conclusion to see whether or not I agree with it.
BM: So, did you finish your explanation?

FZ: That's one of the questions: how do you get your point across? Besides what time it is, that's one of the big questions that a person ought to be asking.

Part 9

BM: What do you think about the minimalists?
FZ: I'm not enthusiastic about minimal music because I think that it's like the one-joke composition. You take any composition and repeat a single element for a small eternity and the joke is over. Are you going to build a career out of repeating small elements over and over and over again. The subtext to minimalism is that it's cheap to produce. The subtext to minimalism is that it's cheap to produce. It's Taco Bell music. It's cheap to rehearse, cheap to mount, and because it doesn't really offer any great intellectual challenge other than the stamina of the listener to tolerate an infinite number of repeats of a small thing, what's the message? This is a musical question which I feel is easily answered and has been answer amply many times, and so it is not a musical question that I am particularly curious about, myself.
BM: The one we just explained - harmonic climate, note and pitch relationship - in Gestalt psychology, they talked of figure/ground, that was the way...
FZ: Oh yeah, figure/ground.
BM: Which reminds me, you defined Gestalt in Circus magazine, back in '69, as "something big"
FZ: Gestalt, the way people normally hear the word, is when it's connected with a certain type of psychology. But Gestalt doesn't mean just that. It's like "concept", isn't it? Isn't that the real translation? An idea object, that's what I'm talking about.
BM: See, there's idea object, matter/mind, concept art, or Miles asking, "What's the IDEA behind this, Frank?" People's interests go either for the image of the idea.
FZ: Well, you have to understand the way in which people voluntarily decide to consume something or participate in it. It has more to do with their own orientation than it has to do with the concept or the conception of the person who made the object being consumed. Got it? Like what I put into the things that I make has little or nothing to do with the way in which people consume them and the reasons they might buy a record, or buy a concert ticket, or listen to this radio broadcast, or whatever. Because those reasons have more to do with them than they do with me.
BM: Just to switch to another level - are there any movies that you have found interesting, likeable, valuable that have come out over the past eight years that you would mention.
FZ: Movies?
BM: Yeah, I read in some interview that you watch movies a lot.
FZ: I wouldn't say a lot. I think I watch more news that I watch movies, but the problem is that my recreational hours are limited. Usually the first thing I do in the morning when I wake up is turn on the news in our bedroom just to get a blast of that before I brush my teeth.
BM: That's CNN Headline News. You get the repeat.
FZ: I don't get the Headline News, I get the droning long version. They cycle that in one-hour or two-hour blocks.
BM: But it's CNN?
FZ: Yeah, CNN. So I turn on CNN and I watch that, and then I go to work, and then after I'm finished work, I'll turn on CNN, or I'll turn on C-Span and I'll scoot around and look for news. If I've already seen it or if I know what's coming up, then I'll switch to one of the movie channels and I'll watch that. But I don't go to the movies. The only movies that I see are things that have already been out.
BM: Any that you've found surprisingly good?

FZ: There've been a few, but I can't even remember the names of them. I think basically the quality of films in terms of content leaves me pretty empty, doesn't stimulate me at all. I used to like monster movies when I was a kid just because they were so laughable, but, even now, they're nauseating.
BM: Around '79 you were asked if you ever cried, and you said that movies make you cry. What part? What kind of content - how bad it is?
FZ: No, no. It's completely irrational. I mean I can do the same thing going to a Broadway show. I can literally hate the show and find myself crying because of something that happened in there. And I know that the fact that liquid comes out of my eyes has got nothing to do with reality. I'm sitting there consciously thinking that this show is a piece of shit and I'm crying, and I'm saying to myself, "Well, at least I have some sort of average-scale, average-size, average-vulnerability human factors working". But at the same time I'm sitting there going "Why?" And I've given some thought as to what motivates people to have that feeling for no reason at all, to just start crying. It's not even because it's sad. And I haven't got that down to a thirty-second sound bite yet, but one of these days I will. I just know that what people normally think of as human feelings are not what they think they are. I see chemistry here.
BM: That's very interesting because I have the same thing happening to me when I go to movies and I wonder, while I'm sitting there observing it, what physical chemistry is working on me that I know I"m not aware of, but it activates the body.
FZ: Yeah.
BM: Well, I'm glad I asked that question. That's an interesting answer. So, you're still working on that one?
FZ: Yeah.
BM: No policy statement yet. When you put out CRUISING WITH RUBEN AND THE JETS in '68, many people were surprised that you liked that music. Do you still like that music now? Have you changed? Would you put out CRUISING WITH RUBEN AND THE JETS now, if it hadn't been done then?
FZ: It would be harder to put it out now because we're so much farther away. '68 is a lot closer to '58 then it is to '88, and it would be hard to find vocalists. In order to give a convincing rendition of that style of music, you have to have singers who understand the idiom, and they're getting harder and harder to find.
BM: In the book "Does This Kind of Life Look Interesting To You?", there's a picture of you from Melody Maker, about '67, under which you wrote, "Here I am, propping up the glitter shortage".
FZ: That wasn't my text.
BM: Oh, O.K. Do you remember that?
FZ: Is it me in a dress?
BM: Yeah.
FZ: The original headline for that was "Meet a Mother". It was the front page of Melody Maker, and the reason that I did it was we had a bunch of pictures taken with all the guys in the Mothers Of Invention wearing dresses because I think the Rolling Stones had just done a drag photo. Only they tried to make it look glamorous. And so, we had probably the ugliest band on the planet at that time. You want to see an ugly guy in a dress? Look at this son of a bitch.
BM: So, whatever was written under there about a glitter shortage was done by someone else. I just thought it was some kind of ecological marking like "I see a trend, I create a counter-trend to balance it off". Now, you did that with CRUISING WITH RUBEN AND THE JETS. You know, you wanted people to get back to dancing together.
FZ: Oh, that was a joke. I don't think that....
BM: Yeah, it's a joke, but it's social criticism, it's interesting. CRUISING WITH RUBEN AND THE JETS comes out then. Is it totally "I want to do this now, I want to hear this and I

want to get this on record" or are you saying, "Maybe these people need to know some of this" just to balance it off?
FZ: Both those things.
BM: Yeah, that's where you get an idea - what you would like to do, that's the fun part, and then you see a need for it.
FZ: Well, I see a need because I'm watching the news and I'm looking at my environment, and I spot trends and I say, "How can I be useful?" One useful thing I can do is say, "You're all in this trend but have you considered the possibility that there's something wrong with your trend? Have you ever doubted that maybe a Rolex watch as a life goal is perhaps not quite the pinnacle of human achievement?"
BM: Now, that's easy to do, in a way. Maybe it's not easy to pick the right trend, but to criticize what's obvious in commercials or in magazine ads...
FZ: Well, you think it's easy unless you put yourself in a position where, if everybody believes that that's the way the world is, you run the risk of being hated by everyone because you're popping their bubble. AS if you could pop their bubble. There's no way I would ever dissuade a person who believes in the Rolex mentality from not going after the Rolex. They could care less what I think about them, but it still needs to be said.
BM: For those who are teetering on consciousness.
FZ: That's right, right on the fucking brink. And the other thing is: maybe twenty years from now, if we're still around, and people look back on those idiot Yuppies and the stuff that they were interested in, there will be on guy who said, "Take the Rolex and stuff it"> And it's the same thing with WE'RE ONLY IN IT FOR THE MONEY album. At the time that Hippies were happening, you couldn't say anything against Hippies. They were hot merchandise. You couldn't ridicule them. And to ridicule them and have long hair, that was blasphemy.
BM: Maybe that's why you were blacklisted.
FZ: Could be.
BM: You screwed up the marketing, although there's probably evidence for other reasons. I heard Dave Porter's interview with you last week and I liked that part where you said, "There is still that chunk of people from the McCarthy era that are still very powerful on the political end and move through still 'fighting that fight'"
FZ: That's right. You've got to understand why they're "fighting that fight". They're not fighting a fight, they're selling a scam. The whole McCarthy era was a scam, and it was another attempt to just clamp down. It was a move toward authoritarian government. It was a tool that was used by people who wanted to move things in that direction. It wasn't just McCarthy. It was J. Edgar Hoover, he was a willing accomplice in all this stuff. He was feeding him the information.
BM: That's what was interesting about Mae Brussell's research because she had those names that were very involved in the Fifties and then in Reagan's California government. People like Louis Giuffrida who was involved in REX 84 that was exposed by the Christic Institute. That team came from the Sixties and from the Fifties. What was interesting was that Larry MacDonald was part of that network and they were caught. Do you remember the Western Goals issue here in Los Angeles in '83?
FZ: Yeah.
BM: It was not covered in the national media for a long time, but MacDonald's Western Goals organization was to appear before a grand jury around the middle of September of '83, but he went down in the KAL 007 two weeks before. And that's where Larry Flynt comes in because Larry questioned the standard line on the causes of the KAL 007's crash. Then he met Mae Brusell who turned him on to what was really behind this same core of people that go back to the Fifties because the files of Western Goals kept had been outlawed in the Seventies, but then the files showed up in L.A. detective Paul's wife's home computer in '83. You saw what happened to Larry then - you witnessed it.

FZ: Yeah.
BM: What do you think of Larry being quite subdued now, and Hustler magazine being totally changed?
FZ: I haven't seen Hustler for years so I have no idea about the evolution of the magazine, but Larry was on to something. I think that he was way off base on the 007 case. I think that it's far too much to hope for - that you could willingly get the Russians to assist you by shooting down a certain plane in order to keep a guy from testifying in front of a grand jury. I think that's pushing the envelope. And I told him.
BM: Well, he didn't say the Russians did it.
FZ: No. But, ultimately the plane was shot down by a Russian pilot, O.K. Now, if it had been blown up in mid-air by a bomb, maybe, but it was shot down.
BM: So what was his angle on it?
FZ: He made that big full-page thing. And I was at his house when the "mechanical" for it came into his office, and I read through it and I said, "This is too extreme. People are going to laugh at you". So I gave him some language to add on to it. The first one went out without the language and I think subsequently the language was added to it, but I don't even remember the specifics of the full-page or even the language. I just know that there was something about it that just seemed a little bit skewed, and there was some stuff in there that seemed reasonable. But the way in which it was presented could have been more effective if it would have had just this extra thing at the end. And that's where I tried to help him.
BM: And that went on the later printings of it?
FZ: Yeah.
BM: He believed that the Russians didn't do it?
FZ: No, it's not that he believed the Russians didn't do it. He believed that there was more to it than the fact that three Russians had shot it down by accident. He was into the conspiracy. He had another axe to grind with this guy. There was something else.
BM: You don't think that there was a conspiracy?
FZ: No, I think that it's really far-fetched to think that any right-wing covert U.S. organization could then get in touch with their friends in Russia and get them to send out the lone fighter pilot to nuke some airliner who just happens to go off course into this air space. I think that's asking too much of coincidence.
BM: Other than it was blown up.
FZ: Yeah.
BM: But the Russians went along with the story then. How could you get them to do that?
FZ: Yeah, how do you get that kind of cooperation? I just don't think that people are that cooperative in large-scale cover-ups. There's always something that falls out.
BM: The overall effect of our conversation seems to be that you've acquired a lot of information. You've paid attention daily, and one can acquire a lot of information just by being open-minded. And you keep saying, "Well, obviously the common-sense solution or approach to this problem is this".
FZ: Or at least one of them. There may be more.
BM: And so there's no conscious strategy. For example, I think in that interview in Rolling Stone, of '79, when you talked about being a journalist, you said, "I see certain elements and then I impose a pattern on them". Do you remember that quote?
FZ: No.
BM: Unless it was a misquote. It may have been, but it suggests that...
FZ: It doesn't even seem like what I do. I don't impose a pattern on it. I look for a pattern. I don't impose a pattern on it.
BM: yeah, it implied there's a conceptual continuity pattern that you...
FZ: Conceptual continuity has got nothing to do with me analyzing the news. Conceptual continuity has got to do with me living my life and turning my life into things that entertain

other people. The things that I release in the video and the records and the rest of that stuff, it's part of my life. For whatever it's worth at that time that it comes out. That's a byproduct of my life. That's the conceptual continuity. Analyzing the news is not me imposing a pattern on the news. I try and get as much data as I can and then, based on what I'm able to gather together, I draw a conclusion. And those conclusions could change if I get more data.
BM: Conceptual continuity implies an idea. The way you've just said it, it is a biographical continuity or mental....
FZ: No, no, there is a concept to what I'm doing and there is a continuity to the concept, and I happen to be living inside of the concept. I'm a participant in it.
BM: And the concept is common sense and taking in data and learning.
FZ: That's not the conceptual continuity.
BM: Could you correct me then? State...
FZ: Well, the conceptual continuity is this: everything, even this interview, is part of what I do for, let's call it, my entertainment work. And there's a big difference between sitting here and talking about this kind of stuff, and writing a song like "Titties and Beer". But as far as I'm concerned, it's all part of the same continuity. It's all one piece. It all relates in some weird way back to the focal point of what's going on.

Part 10

BM: Does it relate in a way that you will see more obviously later?
FZ: Well, I think that quite a bit of the continuity is made obvious by what we've discussed here. And I think that if there is a way to absorb all this in one sitting on a broadcast, if anybody knew enough about what I'd already done, they would see that there is a coherence to it that's been very purposeful, and it's been going on for what, twenty years, twenty-five years, something like that.
BM: I think of the scientist metaphor and the chemistry, that point that you saw from Varese and you said, "Yes, that needs to be said". And you keep at it, that idea, that image, that model, the chemistry of music, and maybe it's implied in the tenets of your church. Can you "synopsize" the continuity in the past three hours? I tried to say it was the "conceptual continuity".
FZ: As above so below.
BM: But "as above" what?
FZ: As above so below. You pick the "what".
CD: Fill in the blank.
BM: That was very interesting to talk about how this interview relates to something else that's gone before. In other words, you're trying to communicate. This is the situation we're communicating.
FZ: Well, that's one of the things that differentiates us from... pick a lower species, you know, fill in the blank. We have the ability to communicate with each other using tools which other animals don't have access to. Whether or not we use them properly is yet to be determined.
BM: Now, I'm asking for the right words to come out, or the words that I would think hit the thing on the head, but it's the process of communication, what we're doing here, is what you're talking about - your life, your day-to-day taking in of information. It goes into your work if it's appropriate - an interview, a new encounter. That is the conceptual continuity.
FZ: No, that's random. you allow yourself to experience random events like people coming in. I don't know what's going to happen in this interview. I never know when I do any of them. You allow for random events. The conceptual continuity is something that is steered. It's not random, it's steered. There is an idea that moves it in a direction. It's an object.
BM: Your will or perception of something you think should be included, or an order?

FZ: Yeah, like you're taking your data environment, you're reordering the data environment in order to transmute it into something else, transmute it into entertainment.
BM: Is that attention? Is that steering mechanism attention? Is there an image that it's referring to?
FZ: You mean, in order to steer, you have to have a North Star?
BM: Yeah, is there a North Star in your process? I don't think there is, is there?
FZ: There doesn't need to be. In fact, the only time a North Star is useful is if you have to steer in a physical dimension - in order to get from one place to another in a type of dimension where those spatial relationships are recognized as reality. AT that point you need a compass and you need your North Star. If you're in another dimension, where those types of relationships don't exist, you don't need the North Star.
BM: You may need another kind?
FZ: Not necessarily.
BM: You allow the randomness to happen?
FZ: Well, if you work in a dimension where everything's happening all at the same time, then that would kind of indicate that there wasn't such a thing as distance, either spatial or time difference, or whatever. That's a unity point. So, where's the navigation? You're already there.
BM: So you could incorporate what comes to you in time...
FZ: It's like a black hole. All you've got to do is sit there, all the shit is going to pour in the hole anyway.
BM: Now, there's a negative image - black hole.
FZ: No light escapes?
BM: yeah.
FZ: Well, no light escapes until the density increases to the point where it blows a hole in the other side.
BM: Alright, so this steering mechanism is attention. It's thinking of it as entertainment, which is sort of offering "slack", creating "slack" in a situation.
FZ: There's nothing better for a human being than some form of entertainment. It's good for you. Now, if you think hockey is entertaining, which I don't, go get hockey. If you like opera, which I don't, go get an opera. Everybody needs to have something to take the pressure off of them, something where they can stop thinking about their normal factory rate for a while.
BM: And that's a guiding principle?
FZ: Yeah.
BM: Is that part of the conceptual continuity?
FZ: Yeah. Sure, that is an esthetic value.
BM: I think you pinned it down to my satisfaction. You mentioned hockey. I lived in Nova Scotia for many years and I remember, around the time 200 MOTELS came out, you were doing a radio interview in New York, and the disc jockey asked you, "What do you see in that mural" There was a mural in the studio that he always asked people to look into, and you answered, "I see Billy with a hockey stick". Now, is that what you actually saw or was there a reason to say Billy had a hockey stick, at that point?
FZ: That's what I saw. Some things are very, very simple.
BM: What are the most complex things?
FZ: The most complex thing is trying to get people to understand that everything is happening all the time, and make them believe it. That's a rough one.
BM: Yeah, now that's interesting. Are you including the survival of death. I don't think your church believes that one survives death. In the church tenets, isn't it spelled out there? "We do not believe we survive death".
FZ: I don't think that that's actually said in there.
BM: Alright. When we talk about time...

FZ: I'm not talking about afterlife. This is not mystical, metaphysical stuff. I'm talking about, you know...
BM: All time exists now.
FZ: Yeah. There it is.
BM: And we can experience it all now in this lifetime.
FZ: Yeah.
BM: Therefore, one lifetime is many lives?
FZ: Look, you've got a brain that is part of an organism which will decay. It runs down. Until they find a way to keep the oxidation process from continuing to the point where you rust yourself to death, you're going to fall apart and you're going to die. There you go, O.K.? Now, you've got X number of moments of your undead state to deal with whatever you're going to deal with. And I think that the best way to do it is to deal with as much as you can deal with while you're alive, not as little. Just deal with it.
BM: So, another way of trying to get people to believe that all time exists now is trying to get them to have an open mind, open senses, to not filter data that's coming in. It's the same thing.
FZ: You've just got to listen to all the stuff that's coming in, good, bad, and indifferent. And hope that you have the educational preparation to be able to sort it. That's one of the problems why people would find what I do difficult for them to adapt to because I got out of the U.S. school system at a point where you could still learn to read and write, and I don't think that you can do that anymore. I think that the basic education that people receive in this country is so pitiful that they can't. They're not even equipped to sort data. And I don't think it's an accident. I think that the school system has been purposely damaged to keep people from being able to sort data because only a person who can't data will vote for a guy like Bush or Reagan. You have to be numb.
BM: You have to be numb and at the same time, while they're making the school system impoverished, they are increasing the information flood on people with cable, the multi-channels, and fiber optics. This is the...
FZ: More dread.
BM: Yeah. So, maybe someone could overcome the stupidity that's been trained into them?
FZ: I think it's possible, but it's just too expensive. And there's a lot of people who would say, "I don't want to know. I just don't want to know". And perhaps more than fifty percent in the U.S. prefer not to know. They have a suspicion that if they knew, they would be unhappy because they knew, and they will go to any extreme to keep themselves from knowing. In fact, they will even attempt to harm people who will help to let them know.
BM: And that's our problem.
FZ: That's one of them, yeah.
BM: How many problems do we have?
FZ: A lot. But it all boils down to a problem of mental health. One of the most excruciating forms of mental health is greed. Bad mental health is a greed problem. If you look at all the ways in which greed, as a negative mental health state, has translated into physical problems for people all over the world, you can trace a lot back to that.
BM: So, who are the brain police?
FZ: It could be anybody that decides to opt for employment in that organization. A lot of people police their own brains. They're like citizen soldiers, so to speak. I've seen people who will willingly arrest, try and punish their own brains. Now that's really sad. That's vigilante brain policism. It's not even official, it's like self-imposed.
BM: You once said that nobody ever figured out who the brain police are.
FZ: I've been working on it.
BM: Still working on it?
FZ: Yeah.

BM: Some candidates?
FZ: It's hard to pin it down to one central agency when you realize that so many people are willing to do it to themselves. I mean, the people who want to become amateur brain police, their numbers grow every day - people who say to themselves, "I couldn't possibly consider that", and then spank themselves for even getting that far. So, you don't even need to blame it on a central brain police agency. You've got plenty of people who willingly subject themselves to this self-mutilation.
BM: And you knew that for a long time?
FZ: Well, no...
BM: But to say you're working on it implies some other...
FZ: There's more, there's more. Look, I'm sitting here right now and I'm telling you I'm still thinking about stuff, and I tell you what I've got fully-developed conclusions on and what I don't. And even the ones that are the fully-developed, if I get new data tomorrow that changes it, the next interview is going to have something different.
BM: What are some of the conclusions so far?
FZ: Whatever you've got on the tape. I don't sit around and consciously think of a catalogue, but if somebody asks me a question, I'll just give you my best read at the time.
BM: Because when you said that nobody had figured out who the brain police are, you yourself hadn't figured it out yet.
FZ: I know they exist, but who they are is another question.
BM: O.K., they exist. It's not only stupidity.
FZ: It's multiple, multiple.
BM: Multiple answer, multiple levels, but there is our own self-policing going on. How would you characterize some of the new techniques that they're using? Well we've spelled that out in the interview.
FZ: Yeah, you've already got that.
BM: Yeah, so this interview has been an attempt to figure out who are the brain police.
FZ: Well, you could say that, but I'm not sure that's really true. I think that the interview is what it is, and to just be able to sum it up to say we're trying to figure out who are the brain police, I think this diminishes what's been said here.
BM: Cheapness, that's right. So, this interview is not going to end.
FZ: Oh yes it is. (Everyone laughs.) Look at Gerald beating his leg over there. He knows.
BM: O.K., I think that's a good way to end it.
FZ: O.K., there you go. The interview is now over.

Rolling Stone Interview

This interview appeared in 1988 in Rolling Stone. It was conducted by Kurt Loder, and appears in his book Bat Chain Puller.

Frank Zappa is a very smart and funny man who could still make it as a stand-up monologist, should he ever so choose. But Zappa has instead chosen to pursue his musical inclinations into an area of compositional sophistication that pretty much eliminates any chance of scoring a Top Ten teen single any time in the near future. So does he give up, give in, reunite the Mothers of Invention for a twenty-fifth-anniversary reunion tour? No way. Zappa runs his own record label these days, catering to his hard-core audience. He also does business commentaries for the Financial News Network and has audiences with the president of Czechoslovakia -- a newly liberated land in which, as this is written, he's attempting to facilitate the installation of a Ben & Jerry's ice cream outlet. A self-taught musician and social theorist, Zappa made challenging records with the Mothers of Invention back in the Sixties (including the first "concept" album, Freak Out, which predated the Beatles' Sgt. Pepper opus by two years). Apart from his generational fondness for Fifties doo-wop and R&B music, he has little Interest in commercial teen pop, and if that precludes him from ever having a mega-massive multi-platinum monster chart hit . . . well, okay. He'll find other things to do -- such as lambasting the hapless ladies of the Parents' Music Resource Center (the rock-record rating group) and lecturing the feckless music industry itself on the importance of the First Amendment. The objects of his ire rarely find much to laugh about in such broadsides, but Zappa remains one of rock's sharpest wits.

Were you a comedian as a kid?

I tried to be. It was a little rough, because I had a mustache when I was eleven, big pimples, and I weighed about 180 pounds. I first found out that I could make people laugh when I was forced to give a little speech about ferns in a class in school. I don't know what made them laugh, but they laughed, so I thought, "All right, not bad." So I tried to develop it into a . . . I won't say a fern routine . . ."

What was it that first attracted you to music in the early Fifties?

The first music that I heard that I liked was Arab music. But I can't imagine where I heard it, because my parents didn't even have a record player until I was fifteen. Then, finally, they got a record player, and I think the first rhythm & blues record that I got was "Riot in Cell Block #9" by the Robins. And shortly thereafter, I read an article about Edgard Varese in Look magazine, and I found the Varese album, and so that's what I had. I had the Robins and Varese, and I think I got "Work with Me, Annie," by Hank Ballard and the Midnighters, too.

Did you see any sort of dichotomy between the Varese and the ROB records?

No, not at all. I saw it as a totally unified field theory. What appealed to me in the Varese album was that the writing was so direct. It was like here's a guy who's writing dissonant music and he's not fucking around. And here's a group called the Robins, and they didn't seem like they were fucking around, either. They were havin' a good time. Certainly Hank Ballard and the Midnighters sounded like they were having a good time. And although harmonically, rhythmically and in many other superficial ways it was very different, the basic soul of the music seemed to me to be coming from the same universal source. You know: a guy who had the nerve to stand up and say, "This is my song, like it or lump it."

You taught yourself to read and compose music at an early age, but I gather you weren't otherwise a model student in high school.
I was getting thrown out all the time for various antisocial acts. My father was worried about keeping his security clearance.
One of your fellow students was Don Van Vliet whom you later recorded as Captain Beefheart. What was he like then?
He drove a light-blue Oldsmobile with a hand-sculpted werewolf head that replaced the Olds emblem in the center of the steering wheel. His father was a Helms bread-truck driver. Don didn't spend a lot of time in school; most of the time I saw him was at his house. We would listen to rhythm & blues records in the afternoon, and then at night the most exciting thing to do in Lancaster would be go to Denny's and have a cup of coffee. 'Cause there was nothin' -- I mean, places shut down at six o'clock. Really bad. So in order to afford this trip to Denny's, Don would have to acquire the finances by opening the back of his father's bread truck. See, the cab was locked, and the change maker was hanging in the front. He had to undo the back door, pull out this bread drawer which was about from here to the wall, put it in a driveway and force Laurie, his girlfriend, to crawl through this slot like a squid to get in there and steal change. Then he'd pull her out by the ankles, and that's how we would finance our entertainment.
By the early Sixties, you'd moved to Cucamonga and started working in a small recording studio there. What kind of place was that?
It was built by a guy named Pall Buff. Paul is a genius, a great guy. Most places in those days were far-out if they had a three-track machine. Paul built his own five-track recording machine so he could do overdubs. He built this studio from scratch out of just garbage, using knowledge that he learned when he was in the Marines. And it was a great place. "Wipeout" was recorded in that studio, in one session. A little-known fact. I was brought over there by Ronnie Williams, a musician I'd been jamming with in local bars. During that period of time, which was roughly '61, '62, there were these things called novelty records, you know? Like "Please, Mr. Custer." Radio still had a slight sense of humor. So if you could do a novelty record, the chances were you could lease it to a record company. I wrote one, and Paul and I leased the master to Capitol for the unheard-of sum of a $700 advance. I mean, that was a whopper. And the reason was because this record looked like it was gonna be unbelievably hot. You know why? It was called "The Big Surfer," and what it was, it was a guy -- a San Bernardino disc jockey named Brian Lord -- who could do Kennedy's voice better than Kennedy. It was like a take-off on the First Family album, where Kennedy is judging a surf contest. And totally produced -- sound effects, the whole business, okay? The unfortunate part of the record was the punchline: the winner of the contest got an all-expense-paid trip as the first member of the Peace Corps to be sent to Alabama. Well, shortly after we signed the contract, Medgar Evers got killed, and Capitol refused to release the record.
You were expecting this to be your big breakthrough?
Yeah, well, it could've been. It was a cool record.
You also did the soundtrack for a movie called The World's Greatest Sinner at that Cucamonga Studio. What kind of movie was that?
It was a feature film produced, directed by and starring Timothy Carey.... I did the score and the rock & roll theme song for it. The premise of the film was: a man believes he's God, doubts himself, breaks into a church, steals the communion bread, sticks a pin in it to find out whether or not it will in fact bleed, it bleeds, and he realizes he's not God. How's that for a great plot?
You almost made your own movie in Cucamonga, with Don Van Vliet in the title role. But then came your "porno" bust. What exactly was that all about?
Well, there's aspects of it that I still really don't understand. I was trying to make a science-fiction movie in a store-front building in Cucamonga, okay? I had the recording studio, and

I had enough space in the back to actually put up sets and shoot the thing. I had gone to an auction at a place in Hollywood called the F.K. Rocket Studios. They were going out of business, and for fifty dollars I got a flatbed truck full of scenery. So I was ready to make a movie. And the name of the movie was Captain Beefheart vs. the Grunt People. I had also got, as part of this blob of scenery, a sign that said TV PICTURES -- a nice red sign with gold lettering on it. Now, my little place was directly across the street from the holy roller church and half a block away from a grammar school. In a town where, if I had hair half as long as yours, I would be considered a menace to society, and the approved dress code for men was white short-sleeved shirts -- T-shirts were a mark of unusual behavior. That's Cucamonga. So here I am living in this studio, and living there with me were two white girls and a black baby.

How did they. . . ?

It's real complicated. They didn't have a place to stay, you know? I was helping them out. And in order for me to earn a living -- since there weren't surf bands beating down my door to record yet another "Wipeout" there I worked on weekends playing guitar at this barbecue joint in Sun Village, up near Lancaster, seventy-five miles away. I got seven dollars a weekend only job I could get. Anyway, while I'm up there doing my gig, apparently, these two girls had gone out in front of the studio and were playing on the street with the black baby -- which offended all parties concerned in this little village. So, the next thing I know, I got this guy knocking on my door saying he was a used-car salesman -- saw the sign, they're having this party and can I make an entertaining movie for him? He starts talking nickels and dimes. I said, "You don't understand. Making movies is expensive. Tell you what if you guys just want to have some laughs, let me make you a tape." So we agreed on the price of $100 to make this piece of entertainment material for used-car salesmen. I thought of this as a great entertainment challenge, myself. He was supposed to pick it up the following morning. I didn't realize that while he was in there, he was broadcasting our conversation by way of a wrist radio, out to a truck.

A wrist radio?

Yeah. It was total Dick Tracy. And while we're having this conversation, he is specifying in medical terms the activities that should be manifested on this tape. And, I mean, I'd never been near a policeman. I had no idea that this guy -- Detective Willis, I think his name was -- was an undercover anything. To me, it was a fuckin' joke, okay? I mean, the minute the man started talking about "oral copulation," I should've gone, "Huh?" But, no, I didn't. Because remember, I was making seven dollars a weekend up there in Sun Village. So he leaves and I set up the recording equipment, and me and one of the girls go into this place I was using for my bedroom. There was absolutely no sex involved in this tape. It was just squeaking bedsprings and grunt, grunt, ooh, ooh, ahh, ahh, ahh. So I got this master tape of grunts. I had to cut all the laughter out of it, it was so absurd. Then I superimposed some background music onto it, so it was, like, produced. It was no more bizarre than side four of the Freak Out! album. The guy comes in the next day, hands me fifty dollars. I said, "We agreed on $100. No deal." The tape never changed hands. Next thing I know, the door flies open -- flashbulbs, handcuffs. It was like Nazi Germany. They snatched everything out of the place -- reels of tape that had nothing to do with this films, projectors, everything. I didn't have any money, so I had to plead nolo contendere. A twenty-six-year-old junior district attorney from San Bernardino County refused to let me go on probation, so I was given six months with all but ten days suspended, plus three years' probation. And as I was sitting in the holding tank waiting for the San Bernardino jail bus to pick me up, I'm visited by this Detective Willis, who says, "If you'll allow us to determine which of your other tapes are obscene, I'll give you back all the rest, erased." And I said, "It is not within my power to convert you from a policeman to a judge."

Your luck began improving in 1964, when you hooked up With the Soul Giants, the band that became the first Mothers of Invention. What were they like when you came upon them?

They were pretty good. I already knew that Ray [Collins] was a good singer; we'd recorded before that. But the thing that impressed me about the Soul Giants, being a rhythm & blues buff, was Jimmy Carl Black -- the only drummer I'd ever seen who actually could sound like Jimmy Reed's drummer.

Really?

Yeah. Think about it: the absolute disregard for technique, know what I mean? The total dedication to going boom-bap, boom-bap. A rare talent.

So you convinced these guys you could make them rich?

No. I told 'em, "Let's learn more original songs and try and get a record contract." And the sax player, a guy named Davy Coronado -- it was his group -- he says, "You can't do that. The minute you start playing original music you'll get fired from these clubs." And he was right. We learned original music and we got fired . . . and fired and fired and fired.

You finally did land a record deal, though, and you've been at it ever since. Do you think the music business has changed at all since those days, for better or worse?

Oh, I can't imagine one instance in which the music business has changed for the better. Not one. Twenty-three years before the mast, me boy, and I can't think of one thing that is better about the business than when I started. The fact of the matter is, it's gotten to be more business and less music. Now, all the decisions about what is musical are made by accountants and fashion advisers. In the old days, they had these guys with cigars sticking out of the side of their mouths -- this was before they had nonsmoking areas in the office buildings. A new act would come in, and these guys with the cigars would shrug their shoulders and go, "I don't know!" And because the signing fee was so cheap . . . I mean, our fee with MGM to make Freak Out! was $2500 -- yeah, split between four guys. And we were lucky to get it. And the reason we did was because somebody went, "I don't know! Who knows what these kids are listening to?"

Apparently, Tom Wilson, the young staff producer who signed the Mothers to MGM, did know.

Tom Wilson was a great guy. He had vision, you know? And he really stood by us. When we did that first album, he was definitely in a state of "I don't know!" by the time we did the second song. I remember the first thing that we recorded was "Any Way the Wind Blows," and that was okay. Then we did "Who Are the Brain Police?" and I saw him through the glass and he was on the phone immediately to New York going, "I don't know!" Trying to break it to 'em easy, I guess. Some things you just don't break easily, though.

What did MGM make of Freak Out! when it was done?

Well, they were violently opposed to it for several reasons. One, they were convinced that no radio station would ever play a record by a group called the Mothers -- and by God, they were right! But not for the reason they thought. Anyway, they demanded that we either change the name of our group or not be recording artists. So, out of necessity, we became the Mothers of Invention.

And how did the album do?

According to their books, Freak Out! sold maybe 30,000 units when it first came out. But I think it sold a lot more, because that was during the time when they were having these problems with . . . how do I describe this? . . . "loose security at the pressing plant." It was something called pressing overruns. The company would send in a pressing order for 15,000 albums; the plant would press 15,000, and then they would leave the presses running for another 15,000. And the second 15,000 would not be reported to your royalty account. They would go into the back of somebody's car and be shipped across the state line and be traded for rooms full of furniture or favors or whatever. And they did it to us, they did it to . . . the biggest loser was the Dr. Zhivago soundtrack -- I heard a quarter of a

million units out the back door. Think of the publishing royalties on that for Maurice Jarre. MGM was a piquant company in those days. But people said, "I don't know!"

The Mothers became emblems of the L.A. "freak scene" -- which was what, exactly?

It was a pretty short-lived phenomenon, actually. Because by the time it made the papers, it was dead. It was a thriving anthropological success for about a year and a half before any notice ever went into Time magazine. By the time they ran that first photograph -- of a guy who used to be called Buffalo Bob; he had Prince Valiant hair, you know? -- the cops were already chasing the kids out of Cantor's and off the street. They closed down every place where a band could work.

So you decided to move the Mothers to New York.

I believed that all the opportunities for performing were right here, even though the scene, as such, hadn't happened. There was no long hair here, there was nothin'. That's where that line came from: "Oh, my hair's getting good in the back." You used to hear these kids coming in from Long Island, with little rags around their heads that's an actual quote from one of them.

And you perceived the of a scene erupting?

Yeah. I figured, look: If it could happen in Los Angeles, where nobody really walks around) what could happen in a place where they had neighborhoods? Think of it: endless potential. So we set up in the Garrick Theater, on Bleecker Street. Four-walled our own show in there. And pretty soon the Fugs were four-walling theirs around the corner, and there was a lot of stuff goin' on. It was neat.

How were the Mothers received in New York?

We opened during Easter vacation of 1967. Freezing cold. It was snowing. But we had lines around the block for two shows a night. We thought: Oh, this is it, this is the big one. We're in New York City, and there's lines around the block. As soon as school went back in, we had three, maybe five people a night. We played the shows anyway. When the place was empty, it gave us opportunities for a more personalized type of entertainment. Say there were three people in there. We'd go downstairs to the Cafe a Go-Go, put towels over our arms like waiters, come back up and serve them hot cider and stuff and sit and talk with them for the duration of the show. That was the show. Other times, there'd be five or six people come in, and we'd offer them our instruments -- we sat in the audience and let them play. We'd do anything. Anything qualified as entertainment then. It was all in the spirit of it.

You also recorded two albums during that stay in New York: We're Only in It for the Money and Cruisin' with Ruben and the Jets -- the latter a tribute to the doo-wop and R&B music of your youth. How did the boys in the band respond to making that record ?

Well, some of them liked it and some of them didn't, you know? Every band I've ever had, there's been a few R&ampB buffs and a few guys that always scratched their heads because they couldn't understand why that was anything worth being excited about. Usually, the great musicians -- guys who really have technical chops -- don't know anything about rhythm & blues. That part of their musical life is completely missing. They have no comprehension of it. They were somewhere else when that took place.

I've always thought that Ruben and the Jets contained some of your sweetest, most emotional music. Why haven't you done more along that line?

Well, I don't know whether doing emotional music is a mark of excellence. That's been one of my downfalls with rock critics, 'cause they all seem to have this feeling that the more emotional it is, the better it is. And that's not my aesthetic at all. A little of each, you know? I like skill in music.

Is that why you've always been opposed to your musicians using drugs, and why you've been such an outspoken non-drug-user yourself ?

I've smoked ten marijuana cigarettes in my life, and probably the last time I had one near my face was twelve, fifteen years ago. And the reason I did was because, since I do

smoke, people would say, "Here, smoke this, you'll get high." So I smoked it, and it gave me a sore throat and made me sleepy. And I must either presume that that's what high means, or something was wrong. But I've never had a positive result from smoking marijuana. It just wasn't my cup of tea. And I never used LSD, never used cocaine, never used heroin or any of that other stuff.

What did you think, back in the hippie days, when you saw all those people getting stoned and purporting to play far-out music.

Well, basically, I saw assholes in action.

You and the Mothers once shared a stage with John Lennon and Yoko Ono and wound up on their Some Time in New York City album. How did that gig come about?

It was 1971, and we were working at the Fillmore East, and we had a recording truck set up out there, because we were doing an album. And we'd played one night until about three in the morning, and I was sound asleep the next afternoon when I heard this knock. I opened the door and here's this guy from The Village Voice, with John Lennon standing next to him and this microphone aimed at my face, waiting to record my first gasp of whatever. I said, "Come on in." And the first thing John said to me was, "You're not as ugly as you look in your pictures." I thanked him very much and offered him a chair. I told him we were working at the Fillmore East and, you know, "How'd you like to come down and sit in?" I thought it'd be good for a few laughs. So he said yeah, and they did. Now the horrible part of the story. During our time onstage, a number of pieces were improvised, but a number of pieces that were played were absolutely written compositions that had already been on other albums -- namely, a song of mine called "King Kong." The deal that I made with John and Yoko was that we were both to have access to the tapes and could deploy them any way we wanted. They got a duplicate copy of the master, and they mixed it their way. I had a copy of the master, and I was gonna mix it and put it out as part of this Mothers album. They put out this record and took "King Kong" -- which obviously has a tune, and a rhythm, and chord changes -- and they called it "Jam Rag," and accredited the writing and publishing to themselves. Take a look at the album.

What did you do?

I talked to Yoko last year, and I said, "By the way, you remember that 'Jam Rag'?" She said, "Well, we have a problem with Capitol Records. We are suing them, you know." I can't imagine that album really sold a lot, anyway. It's the principle of the thing, you know? The other thing that was kind of sad was, there's a song on there called "Scumbag," but the way they mixed it, you can't hear what Mark and Howard are singing. There's a reason for that. They're singing, "Now Yoko's in the scumbag, we're putting Yoko in a scumbag."

Some critics would undoubtedly see that as part of your penchant for cheap smuttiness. Even today, you're still soliciting women's underwear from your audiences, and you keep a clothesline full of panties strung across your stage set. Do you have some sort of secret fetish for panties, or what?

Not on my part. But we used to have two guys in the band who were panty fetishists. It was a way to make them happy and to make the girls in the audience happy, too. I also think it's a good look for the stage. I think a stage with a clothesline full of women's underwear has a certain aroma to it. you know what I mean? We even have an underpants roadie -- the same guy who takes care of the Synclavier. It's true. As far as the smuttiness in the lyrics goes, a person can only be offended by smuttiness if they believe in smut as a concept and believe in the concept of dirty words -- which I don't. It's always seemed to be something that bothered rock writers more than anybody else. I mean, who the fuck are these rock writers, anyway?

You finally decided to retire the Mothers of Invention in 1977. Why ?

Well, for one thing, what the Mothers were famous for -- this wild and woolly weirdness of the Sixties -- had pretty much vanished from our stage show.

How come?

Because as you get musicians who can do certain musical things, you also find out that they sometimes lack a sense of humor. Or lack that particular aesthetic that makes it possible to take a toothbrush and a baby doll and a salami and a head of lettuce and a jar of mayonnaise and make entertainment out of it, you know? Not everyone can do that.

But you've soldiered on. Do you find that your audiences today come mainly to hear your new music -- or to see a living legend from the fabled Sixties?

Look, the people at these concerts are literally fanatic. There's kids that have tickets to nineteen shows. They've taken off from work, they're living in the park -- they're way into it. That's not living-legend time. I think the whole idea of a resurgence of interest in things from the Sixties is grossly over-estimated. There's a huge wishful-thinking factor attached to it on the part of Sixties-age people who wish that it were so. But younger kids don't give a rat's ass about the Sixties, and there's no reason why they should. I did an interview with a guy from a paper, and he said, "What do you think of today's music?" I said, "We are today's music. We are it, like it or lump it. What do you mean? Do you think that what I'm doing is something imaginary? We're out there today. We're doing it. It's alive."

Frank Zappa: Moving On To Phase Three

by William Ruhlmann
Goldmine, January 27, 1989

Frank Zappa is arguably the most prolific and versatile composer / performer of the last 25 years. Primarily known as a rock musician, his work has employed the structure and instrumentation of classical music as often as it has the improvisations of jazz. And that work has been heard on nearly 50 albums of original material in the last 22 years.

Born in Baltimore on Dec. 21, 1940, Zappa moved with his family to California at the age of 10. He began composing music in his sophomore year in high school, and by the age of 20 had written the score to a low-budget film, "The World's Greatest Sinner". At 22, he appeared on the Steve Allen television show, where he played a duet with Allen on a bicycle. He also took over a recording studio in Cucamonga, called Studio Z, where he recorded local bands and his own work. Examples of the results can be heard on the "Mystery Disc" that accompanies "The Old Masters Box One", issued in 1986, and on "Rare Meat", an EP of Zappa productions released on Del-Fi / Rhino in 1983.

Zappa joined a group called the Soul Giants in 1964, and by 1965 they had been renamed the Mothers. The group was signed to the Verve division of MGM Records in 1966 by Tom Wilson, an A&R man and producer who had worked on albums by Bob Dylan. Rechristened the Mothers "of Invention," they released their first album, "Freak Out!", a two-record set, in the summer of 1966.

"Freak Out!" was one of the strangest and most original albums of the '60s. It was followed by a series of equally challenging works, including "We're Only In It For The Money", a parody of "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band", and "Lumpy Gravy", a Zappa solo album recorded with a 50-piece orchestra. In the summer of 1967, the band rented the Garrick Theatre in New York and put on a series of avant-garde theatrical shows.

After numerous personnel changes, Zappa disbanded the Mothers at the end of the '60s and subsequently produced a series of acts for his Bizarre and Straight record labels (licensed to Warner Brothers through Reprise, and soon to be reissued through Enigma) including Captain Beefheart and his Magic Band, Alice Cooper and the GTO'S, a groupie group. Commissioned to write a piece for the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra, Zappa put together a new Mothers band, eventually including former Turtles Howard Kaylan and Mark Volman, and made the film "200 Motels".

This edition of the band continued until Dec. 10, 1971, when Zappa was thrown from the stage of the Rainbow Theater in London by, as he said, "an irate individual who later told police that we hadn't given him his money's worth and that I had been making 'eyes' at his girlfriend. I spent a month in the hospital and the best part of the following year in a wheelchair." Zappa and a new group of Mothers returned to active duty with "Over-nite Sensation" in the fall of 1973, their highest charting album to this point, and went back on

tour in 1974. In the fall, "Don't Eat The Yellow Snow" became Zappa's first hit single, and the album "Apostrophe (')" went into the Top 10.

The mid- and late- '70s was a period of heavy touring and recording, during which Zappa eventually dropped the Mothers name and performed under his own name. The band became a school for aspiring musicians, featuring future jazz stars like George Duke and future pop-rockers like the various members of Missing Persons.

Zappa and Warner Brothers parted company by 1979, with the company issuing the contractual obligation albums "Studio Tan", "Sleep Dirt" and "Orchestral Favorites". (Zappa now owns the rights to these out-of-print LPs, but has no plans at present to reissue them.) After leaving major label association, Zappa became more prolific than ever, releasing, for example, two double-record sets, along with three LPs of instrumental guitar work, in 1981 alone.

The early '80s also saw Zappa turning to more orchestral works, recording with Pierre Boulez and with the London Symphony Orchestra. On his own, he turned increasingly to the Synclavier, a form of studio synthesizer, to replace his bands.

Nevertheless, Zappa returned to the concert stage in 1984 for the "Smell the Glove" tour, again playing rock. 1984 also saw the first release in a series of reissues of Zappa's early material, as the "Old Masters Box One", a six-record set, appeared.

In 1985, Zappa appeared before Congress to testify against the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) and its attempts to censor rock music. Around the same time, he contracted with Rykodisc to begin reissuing his recordings on compact disc. These reissues continue, with more expected in early 1989.

An even more ambitious project is "You Can't Do That Onstage Anymore", a series of six double-CDs presenting previously unreleased live material from the last 20 years. To date, two volumes have been released. In 1988, Zappa mounted his first tour in three and a half years, the "Broadway the Hard Way" tour, featuring an 11-piece band, during which he helped to register voters around the country. A single-disc LP from the tour has been released, and will be followed by a longer CD early this year.

In this interview, conducted at Zappa's home in Los Angeles, he talks about his recording career, from Studio Z to an upcoming project called "Phase Three".

Goldmine: Let's start by taking it back as far as possible and talk about the recording studio that you had before the Mothers.
Frank Zappa: In Cucamonga.

Goldmine: There was an album that came out on Rhino a couple of years ago that had some productions that were done at that time.
Frank Zappa: Really?

Goldmine: It was called "Rare Meat".
Frank Zappa: What, the masters that were leased to Del-Fi?

Goldmine: Yes. Is that all the stuff that ever came out or are there other things as

well?
Frank Zappa: There's much more that was recorded there, but it's never been released.

Goldmine: How did you come to have a recording studio?
Frank Zappa: I was introduced to Paul Buff, the guy who owned the studio, by Ronnie Williams, a guitar player that I was working with in some local bands at that time, and we would just go up there and record. And Paul - I don't know whether you know anything about him. I think he's a genius guy. He invented a number of pieces of equipment that are standards of the recording industry right now. But before you can understand the studio and how I got it, you'd have to know how Paul got it. He was a local boy from Cucamonga who had decided he could go into the Marine Corps in order to learn about electronics, and he did. He got out and decided he was going to be a recording artist and he was going to make his own studio. He built his own five-track recorder at a time when four-track was an absolutely exotic piece of equipment in the industry. Three-track was something that they used for filmwork. Four-track was rare. And the only person who had a machine that was truly capable of overdubbing was Les Paul. He had that eight-track. Well, Paul Buff built this five-track recorder and then proceeded to teach himself how to play just enough notes on the bass to play a bass part, just enough beats on the drum to keep a background beat, just a little bit of piano, little bit of organ, little bit of guitar, little bit of alto saxophone, and taught himself to sing, and proceeded to make pop records that were clones of hits. He would take all the hooks, he would listen to whatever was on the tracks and he would grasp what the hook element was and then build his version of something that contained the same hook-type material. And he was there doing this all by himself, just multiple recording. I don't know how he met Ronnie Williams, but Ronnie had joined him up there and was putting guitar parts on some of his things and then Ronnie brought me over and I worked with him on some stuff, and I brought in Ray Collins, who wound up doing a lot of singing on some of these things. So, he (Paul) got into debt. He was many months behind in his rent, on his lease payments for the studio. And I came into some money because I'd done a film score for a Western, and so I made a deal with him where I would agree to take over his payments on the studio, and that's how I got it. He showed me how to work the stuff, and I went from being kind of an incompetent commercial artist to a full-time obsessive overdub maniac, working in this studio.

Goldmine: How much of that stuff has ever been released?
Frank Zappa: Little or none.

Goldmine: Was any of it released at the time, on local labels?
Frank Zappa: No. The only thing that has come out, I believe "Charva" is on the first 'Mystery Disc '.

Goldmine: How long were you doing that?
Frank Zappa: I don't know, I think maybe four or five months.

Goldmine: Does anyone have rights to that stuff now or does it still exist anywhere?
Frank Zappa: I've got all the tapes. As far as rights to it go, I have absolute right to the stuff wherein I'm the guy that's playing all the parts, and I think that some of the other tapes, I actually have some of the masters that Buff made before I took the place over, and some of them are hilarious. They really should be released, but I have no idea how I would contact the people who are singing on them. There's one song that was done by a guy named Sonny Wilson called "Lonely Lips," which I think is a great song. He was not exactly an Elvis impersonator, but he had an Elvis-type voice, and it's a slow country-pop song with a good hook. I always thought it was a great tune, but I have no idea where

Sonny Wilson is or how one would go about releasing "Lonely Lips." And there's a few other odd things like that. The master tapes, the five- track masters, are unplayable now because the machine upon which they were recorded doesn't exist anymore. You just can't play them back without that original head stack. So the only thing that remains of that material that would be releasable would be the two-track mixes that were done at the time.

Goldmine: Let's jump ahead and go immediately up to talking about Verve. I suppose the unusual thing to me is that the Mothers of Invention would be signed to a label like Verve, which I associate with Norman Granz and jazz recordings, so I'm curious about how that happened.
Frank Zappa: It happened because of Tom Wilson, who was the staff producer for - they called it "blue" Verve. The regular Verve label was black and silver, but blue Verve was for the rock 'n' roll and / or underground stuff. And Wilson was an interesting guy. He's dead now, but he would take a chance on just about anything. I remember one day he came in and announced that he had just signed a Japanese psychedelic artist named Harumi, and Harumi was making some kind of a flower-power album. I never heard the album, I don't know if it was in Japanese or what. But it was the idea that, "Okay, today we're gonna record a Japanese psychedelic record." A lot of the credit for the odd stuff that went on the label has to go to him because he was the one who would stand up to the people that wrote the paychecks and say, "Yeah, I wanna record and / or produce these things." Without Wilson, we never would have got a contract.

Goldmine: So he was the A&R guy as well as the producer.
Frank Zappa: Yeah.

Goldmine: And, I guess, your connection to the company, too. I mean, they must have had trouble figuring out what kind of band it was or how to deal with it.
Frank Zappa: They had no idea what kind of band it was. As a matter of fact, when I went to New York for the first time and was taken to the MGM / Verve office, they had a cafeteria in the building for the employees. They wouldn't even let me in, 'cause I had long hair. That's the kind of a world it was, it was just bizarre. And I went in there with Wilson, they threw us both out. He was black and I had long hair.

Goldmine: In the first _Old Masters_ book, you talk a little bit about the difficulty of wresting the Verve tapes from whatever vault they were in. I wondered if you could elaborate on that, and then I wanted to talk about the matter of some of the re-recordings that had to be done. But what was the legal status and when did the recordings go out of print and what were the rights to them? Or is there a simple way of describing that?
Frank Zappa: There is no simple way of describing that, but basically, there was a lawsuit that lasted eight years and at the end of the eight years I got the rights to all my old masters back and when the actual tapes were returned to me, the ones that were in possession of (what was by then called) MGM / UA were in pitiful condition. The oxide was actually failing off of the tape. I mean, you could unreel the tape, and you could see through it. It was like Scotch tape with black flakes on it, was what it looked like. And so, if you played it, what you'd hear would be a piece of music and then silence and then scratchy sound, or the volume dropped real low and then came back, and there was no way you could take the original mixes and treat them, there was no scientific method that would allow you to doctor up the original mixes in order to release them. They had to be reconstructed from the four-track master tapes or the eight-track master tapes.

Goldmine: I'm sorry, I'm confused, because I thought you were talking about the

master tapes.
Frank Zappa: No, no, there's two. The word "master" applies to several different classifications of tape. The original master for "Freak Out!" was four-track, and also for "Absolutely Free", and then, by the time "We're Only In It For The Money" came along, we were up to eight-track, and two of the songs on that album were actually 12-track. We didn't do a 16-track recording until "Hot Rats"; that's how the world progressed. The other word "master" applies to the two-track mix, or the mono mix that would be made from the original master. Both of them are called "master". The thing with the flakes coming off was the two-track master.

Goldmine: Okay, but did you have either the four-track master or the eight-track master to go back to?
Frank Zappa: For some things, yes, some things, no. I do not have the four-track masters for "Lumpy Gravy". Nobody knows where they are.

Goldmine: That was an album that originally came out on Capitol, is that right?
Frank Zappa: That's right. I was offered a chance to write for and conduct an orchestra by Nik Venet at Capitol Records, and he presumed that even though I was signed to Verve as an artist, my contract was a rock 'n' roll performer / vocalist, it had nothing to do with my work as a composer or a conductor. It wasn't even mentioned in the contract. But in spite of that, at the point where Capitol had invested about $40,000 into recording this orchestra, MGM / Verve threatened Capitol with a lawsuit, and so the thing was unresolved for about 13 months and finally, Verve bought the masters from Capitol at cost and at that point it was possible to release it. But nobody at Verve would ever have given me - $40,000 in those days, to record an album with an orchestra in a studio? No way. With all respect to Tom Wilson, nobody at that Company had the vision of Nik Venet. (Author's note.- Nik Venet is probably best known as the A&R man who signed the Beach Boys to Capitol and worked with Brian Wilson on the production of their early albums.)

Goldmine: There's been some controversy about what you did with "We're Only In It For The Money " for the "Old Masters" set and the Rykodisc CD, the bass and drum tracks that were added to it. Was that the only solution to this tape problem?
Frank Zappa: No, bass and drums added was not a solution to the tape problem. The tape problem had to be dealt with a remix, no matter what. The idea of putting digitally recorded bass and drums onto those tracks was a creative decision that I made because I've always thought that this material in We're Only In It For The Money was good material, but I hated the technical quality of the recording; we were just trapped into that level of technical quality because that's the way the world was then. I mean, we were virtually using a prototype eight-track machine when that album was done. We were working in a studio in New York that had one speaker for every track. You sat in front of eight speakers. And you couldn't punch in and out without leaving an enormous click on the tape. It was living hell to mix something from that machine because every time you had punched in to add a part, in advance of pushing that part up in the mix, you had to first duck it out to get rid of the click. You had to either duck it out or cut it out with a razor blade, which would screw up the rhythm of the tape. So it was a nightmare to mix that stuff. Now, some of those things, we could never get them out. There's just no way, because there are clicks right in the middle of vocals and things like that. But I've always had a kind of fondness for the tunes that were in there, and I wanted to enhance that album above and beyond the level of 1967 technical development. So that's why as a creative decision, I decided to put it on. The problem with people who are collectors and purists and stuff like that is, their regard is not for the music, it is for some imaginary intrinsic value of vinyl and cardboard. People who demand to have the original release of this, that, and the other thing in the original

wrapper and all that stuff, that's fetishism. And I think that's fine, if you want to be a fetishist and have that kind of a hobby. But it is a type of attitude that I don't share when it comes to re-releasing the material. I think that the material should have a chance to sound as good as you can make it sound, given the technical tools that are at your disposal. So when digital audio came along and you had the possibility of a 95 dB dynamic range, and, in 1967, it might have been, maybe 40 dB or something like that, the chance to make those tunes punchier, and the same thing on "Ruben & The Jets", the chance to have some aspect of 1980s transience and top end on those tapes was something that I felt was worth the time and the money that I spent redoing it. If it was just a matter of re-releasing stuff and dumping it out on the market, you wouldn't take any time with it at all. But everything that is released here has been completely gone over in terms of either equalization or, in the case of those two albums, new parts added to it. In the case of "Absolutely Free", there were a couple of bad edits that were in the original two-track album which I was able to fix using a digital editor, but everything else, pretty much the same. There's a few of the tunes in that that have been remixed from the original four-track, but nothing added to it. I don't have any more plans for taking older material and adding stuff to it - those are the only two albums that it was done - and I would describe any criticism of the addition of the bass and drums as something less than a tempest in a teapot. If you've got time to worry about that, you really must have time on your hands. There's too many other important musical, social and intellectual problems floating around the country today to give a rat's ass as to whether or not I swapped the bass and drums on "We're Only In It For The Money".

Goldmine: Part of the way to look at that, too, though, is to say, who are you reissuing them for? Are you reissuing them for people who heard them then and remember them in a certain way or are you reissuing them for potentially a new audience?
Frank Zappa: It's for a new audience, because I think that a lot of the things that were said in those lyrics, like "Mom And Dad" and some of the other songs that are in there, they have a relevance today. And the problem with appealing to the younger audience today is they have become accustomed to a level of audio excellence and would psychologically reject certain older recordings just because of the way they sound without ever stopping to listen to what the content was. The tone quality of the recording itself would turn them off or dissuade them from in-depth listening. So, in an attempt to meet those new customers halfway I would like to spiff the stuff up as much as possible, so that they can tolerate the sound of it while they're listening to the content that's in there.

Goldmine: The last time I saw you play, there was a point where you said something to the audience about voting for Richard Nixon and then you paused and you said, "I mean, your parents voted for Richard Nixon." Do you think you're speaking to a different audience now from the audience that you were speaking to before, at least in concert?
Frank Zappa: In terms of what?

Goldmine: I mean, are they different people?
Frank Zappa: You mean, have they mutated?

Goldmine: Well, no, I mean, are they literally different people from the people who were listening to you 20 years ago?
Frank Zappa: Oh, absolutely. What, you think there's a bunch of people on crutches and wheelchairs that come stumbling into the auditorium every time I'm booked to do a concert?

Goldmine: Well, you're not on crutches and wheelchairs.
Frank Zappa: There's a lot of people who write about me that have this image that if I do a concert that the people who are coming there are dressed up like Grateful Dead followers and there's just old hippies and stuff. First of all, we never had a hippie audience. The hippies went directly for the Dead. They didn't stop anywhere, they went straight for the Dead. And they've stayed there and God bless them. Our audience has always been really mixed, in terms of age, in terms of geographical backgrounds, whatever. We have strange appeal, it's really hard to describe. For example, the age range at our concerts could be anywhere from 14 to 60, with a preponderance of the individuals in the concert right around 18 to 25. 1 don't think very many other groups have that kind of range. But the idea that the people who come to the live concerts are all just remnants from the Garrick Theatre is completely without merit. Most of the ones who come are new customers. Get it out of your mind once and for all that what we do is to be consumed by people who were going to concerts in 1967. That's not true. Very few of those people have an interest in what we're doing now or have an inclination to leave their homes to go to a concert.

Goldmine: Anybody's concert.
Frank Zappa: Anybody's concert, 'cause usually the older you get, the lower your tolerance for having people vomit on your shoe. And if you leave your home to go to a concert, a rock 'n' roll concert, and that concert usually has a lot of young people who are chemically altered in some way, there is always the chance that you're going to come up with something on your clothes that wasn't there when you went in the door. So a lot of the older people stay home. So, in a way, it's a tribute to us that anybody in that older age bracket would leave their house and come to the show. They're doing it at some peril, I would imagine. And the younger ones that come to the audience are not just there out of curiosity. They come there and they know the words to the songs. So, somehow or another, they got a hold of the material, and if we're playing something that is repertoire, something that is from the older albums, I'll look out there and there's kids who know the words.

Goldmine: There's a development in terms of the personnel that appear on your records, and even on the billings that appear on your records, it gradually goes from the Mothers of Invention to Frank Zappa / Mothers to Frank Zappa. Would it be fair to say that there was ever actually a band, a group in the typical sense called the Mothers, or was it always a band that you employed and they were employees, if you know what I mean.
Frank Zappa: Basically it's always been an employee situation, even with the earliest group. They had an employment contract. I was the one who had to guarantee them a weekly salary whether they worked or not. We're not talking about the Beatles here. It was run like a business, as much as you could run something like that like a business during that period in American musical history. I had to, one way or another, come up with the cash to pay people to be Mothers of Invention. This was not a cooperative, voluntary organization.

Goldmine: In the notes that you make in "You Can't Do That Onstage Anymore, Vol. 1", you talk about trying to defeat a nostalgic notion about the original Mothers. Part of that nostalgic notion is that there was this group of six people and they were a real group.
Frank Zappa: Well, you tell me, what is a real group?

Goldmine: Well, I suppose it isn't a case where one person is paying the others, but

in which there are group decisions made and it's a group situation financially. U2, for instance, one might argue, is a group.
Frank Zappa: I don't know anything about U2.

Goldmine: For instance, the songwriting credits are all listed as "U2". That kind of thing.
Frank Zappa: Well, this was a different way to do business, okay? I wrote the music. I paid the bills. I took the risk. This is called capitalism. And for those of you who don't like capitalism, please consider the alternatives.

Goldmine: There was a Warner Brothers album that came out of various productions that you had done that was sort of a promotion record in 1970.
Frank Zappa: "Zapped"?

Goldmine: Right, and on the back, it said, "Before Zappa dissolved (the Mothers) in the fall of 1969, sneering bitterly about the inability of youngsters to recognize good rock music even when it comes up and bites them on the ass" - the phrase "dissolved the Mothers": was that actually a period when there was actually a hiatus in the band or was that just record company nonsense?
Frank Zappa: That was record company nonsense, 'cause basically, the tour at which the Mothers stopped existing as a band, and we're talking about that original bunch of guys, the end came in 1969 after a concert in the Carolinas. We were on a George Wein jazz tour and we were booked with Roland Kirk, Gary Burton and Duke Ellington. And I witnessed a situation backstage with Duke Ellington begging the road manager of the tour for a $10 advance. Duke Ellington ... begging .. for a $10 advance. And we were booked into a hall - it was one of those large, circular halls like an arena, big place - and the PA system was jukebox speakers around the room. And there we are, a 10- or 11-piece band that I had then. And I started the tour off, I had to take $400 out of my bank account to eat on while I was doing the tour and I was still responsible to pay the weekly salaries of the band and crew that was out there. At the end of that tour, I was $10,000 in debt. I felt like, I'm Duke Ellington here, in that sense of the word. So after that gig, I just said, there's no way I can continue this, because to be honest about it, with very few exceptions, most of the people in the band didn't want to rehearse. It was just a job to them. You couldn't get them to put in extra effort to make the group move forward to do anything spectacular. They didn't have any faith in it, it was their gig. And when I said we're not gonna do this anymore, they were upset. It was like somebody canceling their social security. There's no way I could have afforded to give them more money to keep them going. It's not coming in to me, what am I supposed to do? And one of the last things that I did as that group broke up was, Jimmy Carl Black came to see me, he had five kids, and he came to me and said, "Look" - at that point, his playing had certainly gone into a slump since the first time I saw him playing at the Broadside in Pomona - and he said he wanted to take drum lessons. And I said, this is good. I gave him $100 to take drum lessons. I don't know whether he ever took the lessons. I'd done everything that I could with those guys to help them out, but there's no logical way you could expect any employer to just keep shoveling out money for no services rendered. And I don't think there's a logical person reading this that could put themselves in that position and say, yeah, they would voluntarily hock everything that they owned in order to keep a bunch of guys going who didn't even want to do the job. They didn't give a shit. Anybody who takes the risk to put a band together, especially a big band, is taking a big risk, because you can make a far bigger profit with a power trio. You don't make as interesting music, I don't think. But if you want to have a band with a lot of guys in it and be able to produce music with those kind of tone colors to it, you have to be just a little bit crazy. And I learned the same lesson all over again on this last tour. It was

an 11-piece band. We rehearsed for four months, we toured for four months. I lost $400,000. But the tapes are unbelievable. And the audiences that saw the show really got a big thrill out of it. They liked the band. There's no way I could keep it going.

Goldmine: So that was just a function of the economics of having that many people.
Frank Zappa: Yeah, it was five trucks, two buses, 43 guys, all on the road in a band and support crew and the rest of that stuff. And we weren't doing fireworks or anything spectacular out there, it was like a basic touring package: enough lights to see the show, enough PA to hear the music and enough crew to set up the gear. It's not like taking a glamorous entourage out there. Just was not a money-making proposition. In a way, I'm glad I did it, though, just because of some of the musical things that did get recorded.

Goldmine: I know there's a "Broadway The Hard Way" CD. Do you think that you have sufficient material that there may be later releases as well from this tour?
Frank Zappa: Oh, part of this stuff, because it is repertory material, is ideal for "You Can't Do That Onstage Anymore", so it'll be incorporated in there. One of the reasons why I did "You Can't Do That Onstage" is for the people who have seen the band grow over the years. It gives them a chance to compare different versions of the same song played by different bands year after year. And some of the versions that were played by this band really are the accumulation of all of the skill of musicians through the ages totaling on the repertoire that are just plain hard songs. And every band wrestles with the technical difficulties of playing those songs. "Black Page" is hard, things like that. "Strictly Genteel". All the ones that require a high level of musical competence, this band basically did a good job playing those songs. It will be nice to put those versions into the albums.

Goldmine: When we say that you broke up the band at that point, back in '69, what we mean is you stopped paying them the weekly wage whether they worked or they didn't work, and you stopped going on the road.
Frank Zappa: I said, no, this is it. I don't want to do Mothers of Invention anymore. That's it, bye.

Goldmine. This was about the same time that you were doing a whole series of outside productions for Bizarre and Straight?
Frank Zappa: No. Those hadn't really got rolling yet.

Goldmine: Was that the next thing that followed after that, though?
Frank Zappa: Yeah. I mean, I had to do something.

Goldmine: You were at that point on Warner Brothers.
Frank Zappa: Not on Warners. We were on Bizarre.

Goldmine: Which was not associated at that time?
Frank Zappa: Distributed by Reprise which was a subsidiary of Warner Brothers. Got it?

Goldmine: Yes, sir.
Frank Zappa: Not quite as bad as all those multiple credits that you see at the beginning of a movie, a so-and-so production of a film by blah, blah, blah.

Goldmine: I suppose as a result of that that you didn't have trouble getting the rights to the albums that appeared either on DiscReet or Bizarre or whatever at a later time. Did you always own those and they were just being leased to or distributed by this giant conglomerate of many names?

Frank Zappa: Those masters were always supposed to revert.

Goldmine: Having dropped the band for these good reasons, why did you then put together another band only, what, about a year later or so?
Frank Zappa: Well, after I broke that band up, I made the "Hot Rats" album, I did some recording with Sugarcane Harris and...

Goldmine: Jean-Luc Ponty?
Frank Zappa: Yeah, just for a minute with Jean-Luc. I didn't really get involved with Jean-Luc till several years after that. Then we had this offer from the Los Angeles Philharmonic, they wanted to do some kind of a performance with a rock 'n' roll group and a symphony orchestra. And when we finally did that, Mark and Howard from the Turtles were in the audience and they came backstage after the show and they said they had either quit the Turtles, or the Turtles had broke up, something like that and they wanted to do something. So, I had met them before, on the road, and I thought they were funny guys, so we started rehearsing together, put something together. It was just a fluke. If they hadn't been to the show and come backstage and expressed some interest in doing something, I doubt whether I ever would have called them.

Goldmine: But the result of that was a band that stayed together for, what, about a year and a half, something like that?
Frank Zappa: Yeah, something like that.

Goldmine: With a few recordings until that concert in London.
Frank Zappa: 'Til I got knocked off the stage.

Goldmine: That was the death of that band.
Frank Zappa: Yep.

Goldmine: Let me go ahead and get into the "Onstage" thing in a kind of roundabout way in that sense that anyone who's followed your career over a fair amount of time has at one time or another heard about a 10-record set or a 12-record set, with various titles; I think one of them was _No Commercial Potential_. There's even a little Warners promotional thing that you included in the "Masters".
Frank Zappa: It got so far as test pressings. But, see, the problem was that Warners wanted a rate on the publishing and refused to pay full publishing on the thing, so I said forget it.

Goldmine: What was on that record at that time? Was it 10 records, or how many records was it?
Frank Zappa: It was 10.

Goldmine: And what was that material that was on there?
Frank Zappa: It was live recordings, basically, that were done either using a Scully two-track or a Uher two-track with a portable mixer, mostly from '68 and '69.

Goldmine: Do you still have that stuff?
Frank Zappa: Yeah.

Goldmine: And do you have any plans to include any of it with - I guess a couple of things have already turned up on the first "Onstage".
Frank Zappa: Yeah. But I just think that there's so much better material since that time and

there's no reason to dwell on the '68-'69 period, just in terms of listening quality. Unless you're an archive freak or a music historian or something like that, it is not necessarily a pleasurable experience to listen to the technology of 1968, and some of the tunes that were played by that band have been played by other bands so much better. The aesthetic goals of that series, "You Can't Do That Onstage Anymore", have more to do with the growth of the music and a celebration of the good parts of live performance. There are a lot of good things to be said about playing on the stage in terms of unique events that will happen one time only for that particular audience and if you've got a tape running and you've captured it, you've got a little miracle on your hands. And so, the things that are included in the series, I generally give the nod to that particular version of a tune that may have occurred on one of those nights when the performance was unique. Sometimes the recording quality is not as good as some other version of it, but I want to put as much of the unique stuff in there as possible. And I don't know whether it's because the frequency of recording has increased over the years or that the bands did more unique things, but it seems in listening to the material available that the more entertaining or unique events are not of the early Mothers of Invention period. In fact, there are very few that exist on tape from the early MOI period. The most unique things that that band ever did were all at the Garrick Theatre in 1967 and there's no tape of that. I have no tape of the Garrick Theatre.

Goldmine: There's no record of that at all?
Frank Zappa: I think some people may have booted some stuff, but I have nothing in my collection. We actually had the opportunity to tape the whole show and Verve wouldn't do it. We had a deal with Wally Heider who at that time had a recording truck in New York City; he had all this gear in a van and he needed a place to park his van. And I wanted to make a deal with him that we'd give him parking space for the van outside of this theatre which we had rented. All he had to do was just turn the tape on every night. And we could have had it. Verve wouldn't do it.

Goldmine: Did going from the band that had been put together at one time in the '60s, to a situation where you were auditioning people and changing musicians, cause a jump up in the musical abilities of the band?
Frank Zappa: Well, let's just say that the first band was put together partly by accident and partly by - there was just no other way to get any players to do it. You couldn't go out and audition. You just couldn't. Especially if you wanted to do technical stuff. If you look at recent musical history you'll notice that in those early days there were very few people with conservatory chops who would venture into the world of rock 'n' roll. It simply wasn't done. If you had conservatory skill, you might play jazz, but you certainly wouldn't go out and play this stuff. And I was lucky enough to have a few conservatory type of people in that band: Ian Underwood, Art Tripp, Ruth Underwood, these were people with great musical skill. But the rest of the guys were regular guys. So at the point where it was possible to audition and select from a variety of choices of people to be in the band, I think the musical quality of the band shot up about a thousand percent.

Goldmine: I think at this point you have the sort of reputation in rock that Miles Davis has in jazz; one sees people going off from your band to - well, actually often to a lot of jazz things. Do you get a lot of people auditioning or calling you to get in your bands?
Frank Zappa: Yeah, it's been that way since I first started auditioning. I mean, we have file drawers full of resumes and cassettes that people have sent in and that kind of stuff. There's a guy who just called two days ago, wanted to be the new "stunt" guitar player. I don't know how he got my phone number, but he called right here to the house and I have no plans of touring in the near future, so I just filed his stuff away.

Goldmine: I guess a lot of the recording you're doing now is stuff that you're doing with machines by yourself. You're not bringing in other musicians too much.
Frank Zappa: Most of the stuff I'm working on right now is just to mix what happened on this last tour. The only time I'll put a musician in front of a microphone in this studio is to do sampling. We haven't had a real recording session in here since 1981.

Goldmine: Since we had left off somewhere in the '70s, let me ask you about "The Helsinki Concert", which is the newest volume of "Onstage". Tell me about those tapes, about what's special about them, especially in the philosophy you were talking about about this series.
Frank Zappa: Each band had its devotees. There were people who thought that the early Mothers of Invention were a pinnacle of their idea of musical entertainment and won't listen to anything else. There are people who like the band with Mark and Howard and think the "Fillmore East" album is their favorite, don't want to hear anything else. And there are also people (who) like that group with Napoleon (Murphy Brock) and George Duke and Ruth (Underwood), and here is an opportunity to take one complete concert, which was basically a good show, and release it in a way that the listener would get the sense of what that band was like onstage. And one of the things that was good about that show was that there was a lot of improvised, funny talking and witty stuff in there. So it's got part of the attitude of the band and I think it's a good record. It's got some good spirit in it.

Goldmine: Let me ask a question having to do with the way critics view your work, although I wouldn't think you care too much about the way critics view your work. There was sort of a turning in the way people wrote about you in the '70s. I think especially at the point that we're talking about, the Helsinki period, where at least it gave the appearance the records were selling more records, like "Over-nite Sensation" and "Apostrophe (')" were.
Frank Zappa: _Over-nite_ didn't sell that well when it came out. "Apostrophe (')" was the first one that sold a quarter of a million, or whatever it was, and that was our first gold record. And that was an accident, because a radio station in Pittsburgh took "Don't Eat The Yellow Snow," cut it down from 10 minutes to three which was part of a chain, part of their format of playing novelty records from the'60s. The guy who did it heard the song, perceived it as a modern-day novelty record and put it on right alongside of "Teeny Weeny Bikini" and it became a hit. And at this time, we were touring in Europe. We hadn't even released it as a single, and I was informed in Europe that I had a hit single on this chain of stations in the East Coast and what do you want to do about it? And I told the engineer, who was still in Los Angeles, who worked on the album, to edit a version of "Don't Eat The Yellow Snow" to match the way in which this guy had cut it, and put it out. And it was a hit. But it was nothing that Warner Brothers ever foresaw, it was nothing that I could have foreseen as a guy at DiscReet Records, a subsidiary of a subsidiary of a subsidiary. Who knew? The credit goes to the DJ. And the same thing goes with "Valley Girl." Nobody knew that was going to be a hit. And as far as critics viewing my work, the fact of the matter is, if a guy sets himself up as a record reviewer, if he has any knowledge of music history or music structure, chances are he's not writing about rock 'n' roll, he's writing about something else. If the guy's in the business of reviewing rock 'n' roll records, the chances are he couldn't get a job doing anything else. And so, the actual musical opinion is of no interest to me, because most of what they're talking about is either connected to my personality or fantasies about my personality, imagined by people who have never met me. And the other aspect of it is, in order for a guy to build a reputation as a rock critic, you don't get that reputation for being a sensational critic by saying nice things about people. And I'm sure, along with the musicians who have been through my band who have moved

on to bigger and better things, there have been a number of rock critics who have made their reputation by bashing me, one way or another. I'm pretty reliable, I'm always there. When there's nothing else, say something about him, everybody will understand it. But the fact of the matter is, I am still here, and a few of the ones who bashed me, they're dead!

Goldmine: Talking about the music through time, one of the things that's striking about the first volume of the "Onstage" record, given the way you've sequenced it, where it's going back and forth in time, often very suddenly back and forth in time, is that one is struck by the consistency of the music; not only the consistency in terms of quality, but a consistency in terms of vision. You come off as someone who knew exactly what he wanted 25 years ago and still wants the same things, and there's a great consistency to that. Do you see an evolution in what you've been doing musically or artistically, or is that the case, are you sort of out of the head of Zeus?

Frank Zappa: There's certain things I am interested in musically, and certain things I am limited to musically, simply because I have to hire human beings to do it. That's one of the reasons why I'm so enthusiastic about the Synclavier, because you can bypass all the human limitations. I already know how to run a band. I know how to do live music. Okay? I've done it. Now there are other things that are more interesting to me, and by the time the complete "You Can't Do That Onstage Anymore" collection comes out, and anybody who wants to take a scholarly approach to it and follow the stuff through and look at the continuity that you're talking about, the way in which things were done, I think that anything that has been written about me in a negative way in the past will certainly be put to rest by what the actual taped evidence is of what lives on the record. People who said there was nothing happening musically during the '70s certainly didn't listen to any of our stuff. There has been, consistently, from the minute that the band was formed, creative, exploratory, investigative, humorous, multi-dimensional stuff going on with this band, just because it has been like a little research laboratory going on in one way or another, to try things. Where other people wouldn't dare try it, because they would be afraid of what it might do to their career, we would try it, because they've already said every bad thing in the world about us. What the hell can they say? We're immune. We're totally Teflon to that stuff. They can say whatever they want. It turns out to be untrue. They can't do anything about it. And so, with that virtual license to explore, I've been happy to take advantage of that and to do all kinds of stuff that other people wouldn't try, for one reason or another. I want to try it, I want to find out what happens if you do this. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but at least, if you want to find out what happens if you put this kind of a chord with that kind of note or this kind of a rhythm with that kind of a rhythm, or these kind of words in a certain kind of a setting, the evidence is there. It's almost like a textbook of odd techniques and things that would be useful for a musician or a composer to learn. The experiment is there for you to see. It's just like watching Mr. Wizard on television: when he pours the vinegar into the baking soda, it makes bubbles. Thanks a lot, Mr. Wizard, now we know. But there's a certain element of that in this collection. If you have a certain basic musical knowledge and want to find out what might happen on the fringes of musical experience, it's in there. There are some very strange things lurking in that album, and also some basic good musical performances. You have to consider what the average level of musical skill was during each of the years when those tapes were made, and if you have some knowledge of that, which unfortunately most people don't, then the level of expertise that is exhibited by these bands is amazing. People just didn't do stuff like that back then.

Goldmine: Let me ask you two questions about the "Onstage" collection. One is about the sequencing. What really is the sequencing logic?

Frank Zappa: The sequencing rules are determined by things like - I like to do shows

seamless, non-stop. Used to be, we would stop after every song and then you would tune up. Then came the strobe tuner and roadies who could do it for you and so you wouldn't have to do that. And also, the idea of doing the shows seamless, the albums often edited with songs slammed up against each other, and when I first got the idea of making people play edits live onstage, it turned out to be pretty funny, and so that's another one of the impossible things that you wouldn't expect, the whole band being able to make that unbelievable tempo change at a certain point and just evolve from one musical texture into another and then come back and - that kind of continuity. So the source material for "You Can't Do That Onstage" would probably have one song blending into another song, and so my first choice would be, do I continue with the next tune from this year, or do I keep the same song title, which was the natural sequence, and jump to another year, or do I let the intro start from this year and then change to another thing, or whatever? That's number one. The other that you would decide is, how many slow songs have been in a row, how many fast songs in a row, what is the dynamic of the side? Then you also have to realize that each side is constructed hopefully with some sort of talking in the front, and then the side either goes to an apparent intermission or an apparent concert conclusion. I'm trying to avoid fading out the last tune on the side.

Goldmine: So you're talking about vinyl.
Frank Zappa: No, CD, too. So that you have the feeling that you're at a concert, but it's an impossible concert. There's no way you could ever see all those people onstage at the same time, but if you've got a fairly decent imagination, you could especially put the earphones on and be at a show that spans, what, 25 years, with some of the most amazing musicians that were ever put onto a record and there they are, just performing their little hearts out for you. And the digital medium is the perfect medium for that. First of all, it allows you enough time on one side that you can give the illusion of sitting in a concert and that happening to you.

Goldmine: Could you just sketch out what the rest of the volumes of the "Onstage" will be?
Frank Zappa: Oh, what's in 'em? That's hard, because there's so many titles. It's all about random sequencing. There may be one other volume (in addition to "Vol. 2, The Helsinki Concert") that has a complete concert from a complete band, and that would be something from the '88 band, but everything else is all mix and match and some of the edits are, as edits, they're works of art, I must say.

Goldmine: The last thing I wanted to talk about, since all of what we've been talking about is stuff that has been created in the past that you are in various ways arranging, just to ask about what you're writing or composing now. I had a sense a few years ago that you might be moving more toward symphonic stuff in general.
Frank Zappa: Everything that I'm writing now, with the exception of the tunes that I wrote while I was on this tour, is all stuff that is on the Synclavier and that can be any kind of a texture, symphonic, chamber music, whatever. Even though I've got a busy schedule editing albums and doing all the mechanical stuff to stay in that part of the record business, I still manage 30 hours a week on the Synclavier.

Goldmine: So we'll be seeing some of that at some point, as well.
Frank Zappa: Yes, you will. You'll be seeing, the beginning of this year, something called "Phase Three", which takes all the missing dialogue parts of "Lumpy Gravy" and integrates them with all-new music, which will either be completely from the Synclavier or live from this tour, which is a mixture of an 11-piece band with Synclavier with audience, all of them

fitting together to be in the same style of the original "Lumpy Gravy" album, but taking it to a level of technical perfection that was impossible at the time the first "Lumpy" came out.

They're Doing the Interview of the Century – Part 1

By Den Simms, Eric Buxton, Rob Samler

Society Pages (US), #1, April 1990

"THEY'RE DOING THE INTERVIEW OF THE CENTURY"

A four and a half hour chit-chat with Professor Zappa, Part 1

On the evening of December 22,1989, the three Society Pages executives conducted an interview with Frank Zappa in the comfortable basement listening room of his home in the hills of Los Angeles. We could gush on forever about how gracious and hospitable Frank was, and he was generous enough to give us six hours out of his schedule. Although we all know Frank to be a regular, nice guy, our expectations were greatly exceeded. He even served us Christmas cookies and refreshing beverages.

The entire Zappa family was home prepping for the oncoming Christmas holiday & hanging out and preparing edibles. The kitchen is obviously the nucleus of the Zappa family.

We would like to express special thanks to publicist Jim Nagle for arranging and scheduling this interview. We would also like to express infinite graditude to Frank for his time, his words, his groovy vibes, etc., etc., etc.....

The following is part 1 of our interview. In the spirit of accuracy in journalism, we have endeavored to present this interview in word for word form, with only an occasional microscopic modification needed for translation into print.

Participants include: Den Simms (DS); Eric Buxton (EB); Rob Samler (RS); Jim Nagle (JL); and of course, Frank Zappa (FZ).

FZ's Grammy for "Jazz from Hell"
Photo by Rob Samler

INTERVIEW WITH FRANK ZAPPA
December 22, 1989

FZ: Hello?! Hello?! Hello?!! Hello!?

DS: Here we go. Alright. [To Rob & Eric] So what was the thing that you had said about "Manny The Camper" on the way here?

FZ: He wants to buy some white. Manny the camper wants to buy some white. Ya wait long enough, all the songs come true. [1]

EB: Who was the original Manny the camper? I know he wanted white gas, but who was he?

FZ: Just anybody named Manny who had an RV, y'know.

EB: And here he is.

FZ: Yeah. I'm sure he has an RV too. It's probably bullet-proof. One more thing is maybe he'll return to Managua. You could go unnoticed in such a place. (laughter)

EB: Him and Imelda and Leona (unintelligible).

DS: It's always sort of traditional for somebody who's interviewing you to ask about your kids names, but since we've got that story down pretty much, y'know, we have Moon versus Motorhead; we have Dweezil – Gail's toe; we have Ahmet as Ahmet Ertegun and Rodan the Japanese monster, right?

FZ: And Emuukha.

DS: And Emuukha. How does that fit in? I know of the Emuukha Abnuceals Orchestra? What do those words mean?

FZ: I made 'em up.

DS: Just made up words?

FZ: Where do you think words come from? Somebody's gotta make 'em up, y'know. They're only made out of letters.

DS: Alright. And Diva has a middle name, right?

FZ: Well – no, she doesn't, but she's been thinking about adding one. She flips back and forth on this. She actually has two middle names. Sometimes she, when she writes a note to us and signs it formally, it says: "Diva Thin-Muffin Pigeen". Now, she made those up. I have no responsibility for that. She happened to think that those were good names, and I would not be too surprised if she names at least one of her children "Pigeen", because she thinks that's a nice name.

DS: My own area of particular interest, something I've been concentrating on, certainly since that tour, is what you guys did in 1988, so perhaps I could start with some stuff that pertains to that. Can you talk about how you utilized the synclavier on that tour, and, we heard about something you were perhaps puttin' together called "Goin' To Hell".... ?

FZ: "Goin' To Hell" was a sequence that has all these different ways to say "You're goin' to hell", many different ways to say the word "Jee-zus", and then it has all these ugly burping, growling, devil worship kind of demon noises in the background, and some low grunting instrumental sounds. I put this sequence together, and.... what we'd do with the synclavier on that tour is each night there would be a sequence, like a complete composition, loaded it into the synclavier, and during the improvised part of the show, I could turn that sequence on. The synclavier would play a collection of sounds and then the band would play along with it. On some nights we used "You're Goin' To Hell"; on some nights we used some stuff with the congress voices; some nights other things.

DS: There was one particular sound I can remember too, which kinda got me off, it sounded like a combination of you, I believe, from the Mothers Of Prevention album, saying the word "bondage", combined with a burp.

FZ: Oh yeah. That was not me. That's my nephew, Jade, and Jade, he has the ability to burp very loud and very long, and he can also burp words. So, when he was here visiting

in '87, we had a sampling session with Jade. In fact, he got paid the same as any other musician that comes in here to do samples. I stood him in front of a microphone, and let him do an assortment of burps, and then gave him a list of words and phrases to burp, and some of those were put into the synclavier and that's what ya heard.

DS: What did he use to induce the burps with? Somethin' like Pepsi, or, uh....

FZ: Well, he could do it just by gulping air.

DS: No kidding?

FZ: Yeah.

DS: That's peculiar. Can you talk about how the synclavier was MIDIed to some of the other instruments on stage? I guess Ed's silicone mallets, and some of the keyboards?

FZ: Yeah. 'Bout the middle of the tour we hooked up some wires so that I could throw a switch on the stage and any one of three different musicians on stage could trigger the synclavier with their instrumental set-up, so that Ed could trigger the samples on the synclavier by playing the silicone mallets, and if I flip the switch another way, Bobby Martin could trigger it from his MIDI keyboard, or Chad could trigger it from his octopads.

DS: I assume there was probably also some things that you had beforehand manufactured with the synclavier that they were able to do, such as Ed's little guitar riff that he would do....

FZ: No that's actually his sample. That was in his little sampler. Just a loop of one guitar strum. I don't even own that sample.

DS: Most of the samples Ed was working with, were those his or some of his and some of yours... ?

FZ: Most of the sounds you heard from Ed were either his samples or synthesizer sounds that were triggered by the silicone mallets.

DS: I see. Havin' the silicone mallets really kind of opened things up for him, didn't it?

FZ: Yeah.

DS: I guess not only just in terms of the array of sounds that he can use, but also in not having to carry around tubular bells, and all that kind of stuff.

FZ: Yeah. Also the fact that the sound goes through a wire to the mixing console and I don't have to worry about mixing things.

DS: And the problems associated with that. Uh...I've got so many questions here, I definitely can't go through all these, so I'm gonna try to weed through some of these. Um ...OK, uh....

EB: What color is your aura? [2]

All: (much laughter)

DS: It seems to me that Scott's role on that last tour was... well, he was more out towards the front of the stage, and had a wireless, and he was one of. the more ... um, I don't know, I can't think of another word other than "entertaining". He was running around the stage more, and....

FZ: But he did that in '84 also. I mean, if you look at the videos of Does Humor Belong In Music, he was somewhat frolicsome in that band.

DS: I suppose I had that impression because I only got to see the last two shows in '84, and got to see a bunch of 'em in '88.

FZ: Um hmm. Yeah, but he's always been one of the showmanship people in the band, and in fact, one of his legendary performances in '81 was Salt Lake City, where, we used to do Envelopes, and for the first thirty-two bars, there was no bass. So rather than just stand still on stage while Tommy played his part, Scott would invent little things to do, that were not bass parts. In Salt Lake City he decided that he was gonna take this aluminum canister that he had mayonnaise in it for the sandwiches backstage, and he brought it out with him onto the stage, and in the space of thirty-two bars, took his shirt off, took this little rubber spatula thing, coated his entire chest and arms with mayonnaise, in this elaborate ceremony, and then strapped his bass back on and came in on the beat when if was time to play, which seemed a very... kind of off the wall thing to do.

DS: Another thing I really like about Scott, is I like his solo that he does in "Nigger Bizniz", which to me, sort of ... um, I've known Scott for quite awhile; I knew Scott before he got involved with your band, and ... uh ... the way that he solos in that song reminds one of the way that Scott is, which is somewhat comical and, uh ... definitely aspects of being a buffoon.

FZ: Well see, he's more than comical. He's a fabulous guy. I felt really upset that the other people in the band chose to hate him, and chose to hate the way he played, thereby bringing about the demise of the band. That's ... really unfortunate.

DS: What did they have against the way that he played, which to my ears, sounds fantastic?

FZ: Well, me too. That's why I hired him. You know what? The real answer to that .... I'll tell you this way. I just finished doing a documentary for German television. They shot there for two days and at the end of the second day, Scott and Mike Keneally came over, while we were videotaping upstairs, and I told the interviewer, "Why don't you ask these guys what happened to that 1988 band?" And so, for the first time, I actually heard it, in their words, what went on. So, I got a nice piece of video tape of Scott and Keneally answering all those questions in detail.

DS: At the time that that happened, your fans were really confused and really wanted to know what was happening, and there wasn't alot of information that was forthcoming about that. I wound up talking with Mike about it. Just in meeting Mike on tour, and finding out that his background was a little bit different than most people you get in your band, in that he was a real ardent fan of your music, y'know, the walking dictionary of your songs, and all that, was a little different than most of the other people that...

FZ: No, actually there have been two other walking dictionaries .... Arthur Barrow was a walking dictionary, and to a degree, so was Ike, but Keneally is a unique individual, because not only is he a walking dictionary, I've never seen anybody able to memorize anything as fast as Keneally. He's absolutely a sponge for memorizing musical passages. Y'know, if you ... well, Colaiuta could memorize fast, but only for the drums, but Keneally memorizes the entire chunk, the melody, the chords, the rhythm, he gets a picture of it and he can replicate it, y'know, like Boom! Right after he's heard it.

DS: Putting that in the context of playing your music and in your bands, that's a real high compliment.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: He's also a really good guy. In meeting him and just talking with him, I got the feeling that if I was ever gonna get a straight story on that from somebody who was involved and might have their opinion swayed by their own personal experiences on it, if somebody could give me a straight story, it seemed like he might be somebody who could.

FZ: Yeah. He's a real straight guy.

DS: And he basically, in his opinion, he told me that he thought that Scott had got a raw deal. I could have asked Scott, but Scott is Scott. He's somewhat personally involved there.

FZ: Yeah, and he did get a raw deal. But you know who really got a raw deal was the fans, because they could still be listening to that band right now. What happened was that it seemed like out of a twelve piece band, there were three guys that thought Scott was OK. Me, Keneally and Scott. And there may have been others who thought he was OK, but they bowed to pressure from a few guys who just hated his guts. It was like a herd instinct, y'know, and they all just decided, "Well, we'll just say this guy is, uh, an asshole, and we'll try and get him out of the band." What is this, like garage band mentality?

DS: There were things that happened that you, on stage, termed, at one point, as you called them – playground psychotics. [3]

FZ: That's a phrase coined by Jeff Simmons, and that's all it is, playground psychoticism.

DS: Yeah. Well, that was too bad.

EB: I like your Christmas tree.

FZ: Well, there's a better one upstairs. I mean, this one is dyin' a horrible death here in the corner, but you gotta understand, although we have every intention of putting ornaments on the little tree they get for me in the basement, nobody ever gets around to it, and I never have time to decorate it. So this may be ....

EB: Would you like me to string the lights while we're here?

FZ: Go ahead! It may be the only way that I get some fuckin' stuff on my tree. (laughter)

EB: It's nice, but it's like, leaning over and...

FZ: Well it's ... dejected, and it's dry. And the reason it's dry is see that pan at the bottom? They hammer this nail through the tree to stick it in that pan. They made a hole in the pan, so it won't hold water! (laughter) This is California engineering, guys!

DS: Another example of a flake.

FZ: That's right! So you can imagine somebody out there going "Geraldo! Hammer that spike through that pan into the....!" (laughter)

DS: (laughs) I have a list of people I've wanted to ask you about, just to get a reaction from you, as far as those people, and Geraldo was one of 'em. [4]

FZ: There it is – "Geraldo. Fix the pan on the bottom of the tree".

DS: Compared to what you did in 1988, in past tours, certainly through the eighties, you seem to be a little more restrained in terms of audience participation, and just, the aspect of having the audience be directly involved with the music, but in 1988, you seemed to get right back into doing quite a lot of that.

FZ: Well, audience participation depends on two things, well, more than two. First of all, it depends on the audience. You got the wrong kind of audience, you'll never get 'em to participate. The next important thing is where you're performing. If you are in a theater, it's a little bit easier to do it if there's a stage apron out in front where you can accommodate people, because if you're just playing on one of those kind of built-up stages, like you do in a coliseum or something like that, there's not enough dancing area, or if people come up there, they're gonna trip over the wires on the stage, and you'll be out of business.

DS: Well, more than audience participation, per se, I guess maybe I could say too that there seemed to be more of a willingness for chances to be taken, for just real wacko

things to occur spontaneously. Maybe I can compare this to '84. My own impression of '84 was that certainly, in comparison to '88, it seemed more rote. Things seemed more ... kinda the same series of songs that would be done, more or less, pretty much the same way, with less of that tendency for all of a sudden things to just take off; for the secret word to be used, with as much gusto as it was used in '88. The secret word in '88 was brought to a new level of absurdity.

FZ: A fine art. Yeah. Well, you gotta understand that you put a band together and before they can do the secret word, they gotta be so assured that they know the material, that they can get back to safe ground if the secret word doesn't work, (laughter) or y'know. The secret word, it takes a lot of practice to be able to get a whole band to think in that mode, because if you rehearse a song, and you're performing it during the concert, you're relying on what you learned during the rehearsal, in order to do a good job and get everything in order. But say you're playing along, and suddenly somebody in the band starts saying, or doing something which is not part of what you learned. That can really fuck you up if you don't know what to do in that instance. Also, you gotta know that on stage, sometimes it's difficult to hear what the other guys are saying. So the secret word stuff is risky business.

DS: Well, I think takin' chances, in the long run, in the overview, I think pays off. Again, personal perspective.

FZ: Well, I like doing it, but the bands don't always like doing it, because nobody wants to go on stage, and in the middle of their splendid, blue solo spotlight wind up fucking up. (laughter) It could mean the difference between a blow job and black mark on your report card. (laughter) You just don't wanna fuck up out there.

DS: How do they react when a mistake happens on stage, and you integrate that, y'know, sort of teasing them about that in the show?

FZ: Well, some people get upset about it and other people just take it as, like business as usual. I mean, there's certain mistakes that keep getting made over and over and over again, and when they get made so many times, I have to ask myself, "Am I gonna flip out here? Or am I going to make a joke out of it?" Usually I'll make a joke out of it. I think that it's better than ripping my hair out, saying, "No, No, No!!! Don't you guys know what you're doing?" Because, I don't believe that they make the mistake to make me feel bad, or to cheat the audience out of the good performance, but people make mistakes, so what do ya do with it? Use it as material. Bobby Martin has a habit of forgetting the words to certain songs, rather consistently.

DS: He has to stay after school afterwards.

FZ: Well ... the....

DS: I remember you saying that, I believe in Hartford or somewhere. [5] I think later on, you made a mistake, and somebody in the audience passed you a note that said something like, "Are you gonna have to stay after school after this one", [6] or something like that happened, didn't it?

FZ: Oh, I make mistakes up there all the time, but uh, I can do it. I wrote it so I can fuck it up. (laughter) I'll give myself that license. But I don't go out there with the intention of making any mistakes, and I don't think the other guys do either.

EB: With you, it's experimentation.

FZ: (laughs) No, with me it's just the same as the other guys, 'cause I forget, y'know.

DS: Here's something that I was just talkin' with Jim [Nagle, FZ's publicist] about a little while ago. You mentioned that you didn't think it was gonna be possible to tour again unless somebody was able to underwrite the tour, somethin' like Pepsi, or some other...

FZ: No. No, I'm not thinkin' of Pepsi, that's for sure.

DS: Right. Or just some other company that could give you sponsorship. D'you think there's anybody around that has economic weight to be able to underwrite a rock and roll tour that doesn't have to worry about their corporate image and stuff, to be able to take on somebody that's "controversial"?

FZ: Not a company, but there's a country.

DS: A-hah. Do tell.

FZ: Well, I was negotiating with these people in Spain, because, y'know, they have the World's Fair there in 1992, they got the Olympics, and they have the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus. That all happens in '92, and there have been ongoing negotiations for over a year with the Worlds Fair and the Christopher Columbus organization about either putting together a "World Orchestra" that would tour, or financing some sort of a tour of a rock band, and I'll hear more about that after the first of the year. But there's no way that I'd agree to do it unless one hundred percent of all the expenses are picked up, and I am guaranteed that at the end of the thing, I walk away with a profit, because in '88, everybody else got paid, and they all got paid a lot of money, and I lost a lot of money, and I'm not going to repeat that experience again.

DS: Do you think that if that tour had been able to maintain and continue, if the band hadn't broken up, and you...

FZ: I'd be talkin' to you in a dressing room right now.

DS: I thought that if you had been playing through the summer across the United States, some of those summer kind of, oh what do they call 'em ... pavilion type venues...

FZ: Yeah. Shed dates.

DS: ... that hold larger larger audiences and such, d'you think that that might have helped to balance the books?

FZ: No question, because we had a whole summer's worth of job offers, like fifty thousand dollars a night offers that we could have played, but ya can't play those offers if there's no band. And you can't play those offers if you have to finish your European tour, and go back into rehearsal and replace anybody in the band, because it takes months to train people to do that.

DS: Right. You spend several months in rehearsal before you go out, right?

FZ: Four months for that tour. And so, to train people to do it, they're not training for free. You have to pay them a salary, y'know. So, I looked at the numbers. You take the deficit from the four months of the tour, you add to it the further deficit of going into more rehearsals, the fact that the rehearsals would take up the whole summer, and you would miss all the high-paying dates, and then you would have to go back on the road in September or October, and there was just no way to do it.

DS: Go back on the road when it starts gettin' cold again, and start havin' to play inside....

FZ: Yeah. And also having to play inside in places, well, the trick about playing in the winter months is, in the East coast, especially, you are competing with the hockey teams, and the basketball teams, and they have the indoor venues booked, and you have to route your tour around their occupancy of those buildings. So, every time you have to take a divergence in your tour routing that takes you out of the nice straight line, economical jumps from one city to another, every time you have to go (FZ illustrates with hand gestures) VOOP! like that in order to play a date someplace else, your costs go way up, because you're runnin' the trucks, and, y'know...

DS: It don't come cheap.

FZ: It's a mess.

DS: OK. Here's something in a completely different direction. Quite often your music contains quotes from [Giuseppe] Verdi's "Aida", [Richard] Wagner's "Lohengrin", and [Georges] Bizet's "Carmen". Are you an opera buff?

FZ: No.

DS: What about those pieces of music appeals to you? You've been playing around with them for years.

FZ: They're all good tunes.

DS: Yeah. Particularly the "Lohengrin". You've kinda had a fancy for that for pretty much throughout your career, haven't you?

FZ: Yeah. Y'know, I never heard "Lohengrin" until Hi-Fi was invented. Long time ago, before Hi-Fi, I didn't know that there was such a thing called "Lohengrin", and I found out about it because, one day I went to this record store, and they gave away this forty-five RPM demonstration disc of what Hi-Fi sounds like, and that was the thing that was on there. Like, the first Hi-Fi I ever heard was this performance of "Lohengrin", by [Arturo] Toscanini.

DS: And it appealed to ya.

FZ: Yeah. Nothin' else on there did, but.... (laughter)

EB: (unintelligible) with that Varèse record when you first saw it, right? (unintelligible) they used it to demonstrate the Hi-Fis, and they never sold one?

FZ: Yeah. But they weren't giving that away. I mean, this was like a special promo disc that RCA had made.

DS: Let me ask you somethin' else, kind of in the same vein. You obviously have quoted many times too, and you have a penchant for it, the opening notes to [Igor Stravinsky's] "The Rite Of Spring". Now, I've heard that when an orchestra plays "The Rite Of Spring", that there's this aspect of tension that settles over the orchestra, because, what is it, a bassoon that plays that note, and it's hard for him to get a good straight attack on that opening note, and everybody wonders whether he's gonna blow it or not.

FZ: Well, I don't know whether it's correct to say the note is not on the horn, but if it is on the horn, it is one of the most difficult notes to get out of the horn.

DS: Right. Is your fancy for that just because you like the line, or does it have something to do with that particular aspect of it?

FZ: No, it's... I like the line. I think it's a genius line.

DS: Yeah, it is.

FZ: And so is all the stuff that comes after it, which is, that's (laughs) a little hard to quote all that. (laughter)

DS: In 1988, you guys played "America The Beautiful", and I noticed that there was a short lyric change, which was "The only place to be" instead of "God shed his grace on thee". What was the reason for that?

FZ: I'm not sure God did shed his grace on this country. (laughter)

DS: What led up to you playing the Untouchables Theme? How did that come about?

FZ: I think that's a great piece of music. That's a genius TV theme, and I've always liked it. One day, we were in Chicago at a sound check, and I said, "We should play The Untouchables". But nobody could remember exactly how it went. So Laurel Fishman went to a television station, and got a cassette, this TV station was running The Untouchables there, and talked somebody at the station into making a little audio cassette of the theme. We brought it back to the sound check. We listened to the cassette through the speakers that played into the room. The horn players went over and stood next to the speakers and they listened... (to Eric) Were you there at that soundcheck?

EB: Yeah, I was there.

FZ: Alright! And they listened carefully and each guy picked out his own part out of this thing, and they sketched out their parts, and that's how we learned The Untouchables.

DS: That's great! Those are the kind of things about Frank Zappa's bands that I really like. Those abilities to do stuff, to pluck stuff out of somewhere and to do that. You know, that whole Daniel Schorr medley thing, [7] that whole... y'know, I was there for the rehearsal, and I watched how that rehearsal came together, and for me, personally, watching that rehearsal was one of the best musical experiences I've ever had. Seeing how the whole thing comes together.

FZ: It's fun to do. That proves it's fun to do music, if guys just think about music when they're in the band. But the minute they start thinkin' about stuff that is not music, I mean, maybe even in Chicago these guys are sayin' to themselves, "What the fuck do we have to do this for? Do we have to go over and stand in front of this speaker and figure out what the third sax part harmony is to The Untouchables? Jeezus Christ! I'm a jazz musician! (laughter) Should I really be doing this?" Y'know, but the net result for the audience, I think they get off on it, and so there's a time to decide, "OK. You're a jazz musician, but you're here to entertain people too."

DS: You got a job to do.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: I didn't get a chance to see the Jimmy Swaggart / Beatles medley. I did get to hear parts of it, and to hear the thing, to know what it's about. But I didn't get to see it personally. Never having seen it, I have to let my imagination tell me what's happening onstage when it's happening. In "Louisiana Hooker With Herpes", when you guys sing that refrain, and then the word "Oww!" comes after that, I always had this picture of somebody with herpes putting their hand to their lip and going, "Oww!" Did you guys do that, or was that just in my mind?

FZ: No, I grabbed my balls for that one. (laughter) Well, we got plenty of audience sing along on that one.

DS: Yeah. It was a good idea. Are we gonna get to hear that on a recording? What's the status on that?

FZ: I would love to be able to release it, but see, I don't have the right to release it without permission from the publisher, and after that... Michael Jackson owns the publishing, so after my song about him, I'm not too convinced that I would...

DS: Well, he seemed to have a pretty good humor about, certainly about the parody that Weird Al [Yankovic] has been doing of his music. Needless to say, it wasn't quite as biting of a commentary as you gave it, but...

FZ: It's not the same. (laughter)

DS: So it's all up to Michael and the people on his end, who control those kinds of decisions?

FZ: Yeah. Sure, I, mean, I've already edited together one version of it that I could play for ya. It does exist, and it's been mixed, but I don't have the right to release it.

DS: Yeah. Has there been any indication whether ... I assume that you've contacted them and asked them if you could do it.

FZ: Actually we haven't contacted them directly. Gail was the person who handles all that stuff. We have spoken to a few lawyers about it just to find out whether or not I had the right to release it, and just pay them the royalties on it without getting permission, and they said no, that you have to get permission to do it.

DS: Well, I can assure you that your fans really wanna hear that one really bad.

FZ: Well, they really need to hear it. It's a good one.

DS: That's one that seven-eighths of the country, who didn't get to hear the tour, heard about that.

FZ: That would sum it up pretty good.

DS: Yeah, I think so.

FZ: That shoulda been a rock video in release at the time (laughter) that, uh...

DS: You had mentioned too, that you might release [Maurice Ravel's] Bolero as a single, I suppose only in Europe, because of some copyright regulations here in the U.S.

FZ: Yeah, the only place in the world where the copyright has expired, and it's public domain in England. And so, if it's released and manufactured in England, then it could be done, and I've got an assembled mix of it. Sounds great. Maybe next year.

DS: That was a wonderful arrangement. I really liked the little, oh, what was it, "My Sharona", inside there.

FZ: See, you haven't even heard the way it was finally y'know, by the end of the European part of the tour, they really had it down, and they were playing it well. They weren't playing it that well in the U.S. cause we just started doing it within the last ten days of the U.S. tour, so it was still kind of a fresh arrangement. We played it all over Europe, and it was a major hit in the show.

DS: The shows I saw were in the beginning of the tour, so a lot of these things that came later in the tour, the only ways I've been able to hear a lot of this stuff is through the kind of cheezy little cassettes that people make in their seats in the audience, and there was really a lot of good stuff that ... y'know, we wanna hear that stuff on an album some day.

FZ: Don't worry, you'll get it. I'm hoping to have that out next year. There's a lot of stuff that comes out next year, 'cause it's the twenty-fifth anniversary, and one goal is to have the entire catalog available on CD.

DS: Boy, that's a task, huh?

FZ: Well, there's, umm ... what, about a dozen titles that have yet to be released. Ryko's gonna release eight of 'em, no, it's actually more than a dozen, and the rest will either come out through Ryko or another new contract, or they'll be coming out on Barking Pumpkin through Capitol.

DS: Has the work, in terms of remixing, and all that stuff, has that work been completed yet?

FZ: The only thing that is not done is putting together Live In New York, because that's been remixed and extra material has been added into it, and I'm about two-thirds of the

way through assembling those new mixes for that al
bum.

DS: Here's something related to that. I believe that you mentioned recently that you were planning on releasing those three "ugly albums" that Warner Brothers put out, putting them out the way that they put 'em out, with the same covers....

FZ: With their covers, yeah.

DS: Right. As opposed to reverting back to your original intentions of putting out Läther as the four record set. Why did you choose to do that?

FZ: Because boxes are difficult to purchase, because they cost more, and stores are reluctant to, first of all, stores are reluctant to stock anything that I do, but they're even more reluctant to stock a box.

DS: Actually, Ryko has been doing real well with keeping your stuff on the shelf. I can tell you as a longtime consumer of your music, that from the point that Ryko got involved with you, what they do is in marked contrast with what I had seen previous to that.

FZ: Yeah. Well, sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. There's still strong resistance in chain stores, and there's even stronger resistance as far as the video stuff goes. I think we have to thank our Christian brethren for that.

DS: Yeah, perhaps. You think so? You think there's something conspiratorial happening?

FZ: Well, I'll guarantee you that in the case of one major national chain store, the guy who runs the thing, he's a born-again Christian, and refuses to stock anything that I do. So maybe that's just his little...

EB: Who is it?

FZ: Oh ... I can't remember, but....

JN: Blockbuster?

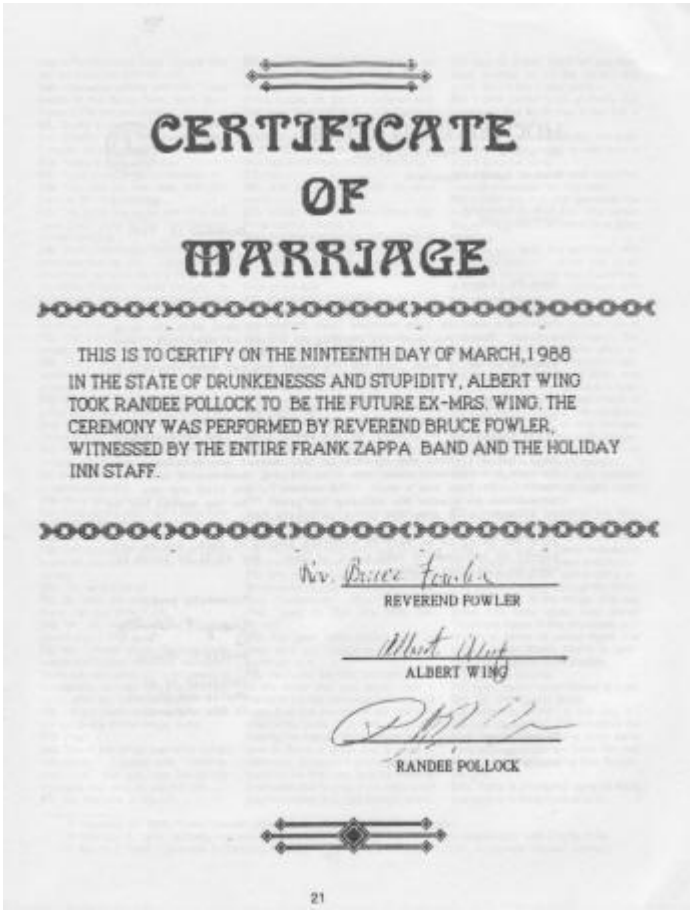
FZ: Yeah, uh, it's either Blockbuster or, um...

JN: I know the guy who runs that is a born-again too.

FZ: Yeah. This is Wahl Lee, the guy who runs MPI, told me that he's had trouble with two, maybe three of these national chains that just won't put the stuff in the store.

DS: Well we would like to know what store is treating you that way so we can ... act accordingly.

FZ: Well, actually, the guy to talk to about stores that won't stock my stuff is Trooper Ash, Chuck Ash, because he's gone to stores in Pennsylvania that just refuse to carry it. Did you meet Chuck? He was there in Washington D.C. He was a Pennsylvania State Trooper that did the interview with me... [8]



CERTIFICATE OF MARRIAGE

THIS IS TO CERTIFY ON THE NINTEENTH DAY OF MARCH, 1988 IN THE STATE OF DRUNKENESSS AND STUPIDITY, ALBERT WING TOOK RANDEE POLLOCK TO BE THE FUTURE EX-MRS. WING. THE CEREMONY WAS PERFORMED BY REVEREND BRUCE FOWLER, WITNESSED BY THE ENTIRE FRANK ZAPPA BAND AND THE HOLIDAY INN STAFF.

Rev. Bruce Fowler
REVEREND FOWLER

ALBERT WING

RANDEE POLLOCK

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HOOVER INSTITUTION
ON WAR, REVOLUTION AND PEACE
Stanford, California 94305-6010

GEORGE P. SHULTZ
DISTINGUISHED FELLOW

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Dear Mr. Zappa:

Thank you for your note of support for my statement about America's need to take another look at how we deal with the drug crisis. Thank you also for sending me a copy of your book. Now that I have President Bush, Mr. Bennett and Mr. Fitzwater all jumping on me, I know just how unpopular you can make yourself by speaking out on this issue.

I feel confident, however, that public opinion will eventually fall in behind a more balanced and sensible approach to drugs. The illogicality of present policy seems clear: we have created by law a vast market in which profits are gigantic; we have then said that all those who operate in that market are criminals; and we then put enormous resources into driving them out of the market. It just won't work. The market is too rich and the incentives to create new addicts too great. So the market has to be dismantled if drug use is to be diminished.

It's not going to be easy to convince people of this, and we can expect to continue to take a lot of heat. But it'll be worth it when we lick this problem.

Sincerely yours,

George P. Shultz

George P. Shultz

(Dictated by Mr. Shultz and signed in his absence)

Frank Zappa
P.O. Box 1265
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DS: I saw you talking with him. I was aware of him being there, yeah. But I haven't met him personally.

FZ: So we'll give you his phone number. I mean, aside from being a State Trooper, he's also a fan, and...

EB: That's a great interview.

FZ: Yeah, a really good interview.

DS: You did an interview with him back in '81 or something...

FZ: I've done two tapes with him that have been used in the Pennsylvania school systems.

DS: Yeah, I remember from that earlier interview that he, uh, ... I found it kind of curious because he is a Pennsylvania State Trooper, I kinda thought, "Is this gonna lead into questions about drugs?" And I know what your views on drugs are....

FZ: That's what it was, exactly. About drugs.

DS: That's kinda what I assumed it would be used for, part of a ... somethin' for the kids.

FZ: Well, they had a big disclaimer on it that these were Frank Zappa's views and not (laughter) the views of the Pennsylvania State Police. (laughs) But, speaking of my views on drugs, y'know, certainly there are some people who agree with the way I think, and in some surprising....

DS: As of late, George Shultz.

FZ: I was gonna say, I got a letter from him in the other room.

DS: No kidding!?

FZ: Yes, and what I should do is Xerox it and let you print it in your little publication.

DS: Oh, we'd love to!

FZ: (to Jim) It's sitting on my desk there, can you bring it in?

DS: Oh, we would love to! He contacted you ... ?

FZ: No. I heard about his announcements and I called his office. He wasn't there. He was out on the road speaking someplace, so I sent him a copy of the book, and I got his letter back.

DS: He got pretty reasonable once he got out of the White House, huh?

FZ: Yeah.

DS: Two of the things that came out on "Broadway", I guess one, "Confinement Loaf" was just, was that on the compact disc also, or just the LP?

FZ: No, that was on the LP.

DS: But I noticed on that and also on "What Kind Of Girl", that whole chunks of the music that came at the end were kinda lopped off, and I wondered why that was. Particularly in "Confinement Loaf" that second verse had some references to Charlie Rose and the Nightwatch interview, [9] I wondered if that had anything to do with anything.

FZ: No.

DS: Just an artistic choice on your part?

FZ: Artistic choice. I don't have anything against Charlie Rose.

DS: And that last part of "What Kind Of Girl". I wondered if that had anything to do with the fact that there was that "Louisiana Hooker With Herpes" refrain at the end.

FZ: That's right. I couldn't use it.

DS: That was also a wonderful thing you did there.

FZ: That was only performed ... uh, twice, in Detroit and Chicago.

DS: Muskegon and Chicago. [10]

FZ: It was learned in Detroit, OK. We learned it at the, um ... what's that little theater where we were working at...

EB: Royal Oak?

FZ: Yeah. We learned it at a soundcheck at Royal Oak.

DS: Leading up to that, you did a concert where you played straight versions of "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds" and "Norwegian Wood".

FZ: Yeah, well first of all, you have to know how to play the song before you can pervert it.

DS: How did it come about just getting into the straight versions? Just an idea that you or someone else had?

FZ: Why not do it, y'know. If you got a fabulous band, play anything you want. Play "Lohengrin". Play "Carmen". Play "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds".

DS: You guys were playing a lot of what we'll call "cover tunes" in that particular tour.

FZ: Yeah, but the total amount of time of the show that you would hear a theme of a cover tune was probably not more than five percent of the total volume of the show. One thing about just hearing the melody of somebody else's tune in there, it gives you a point of reference, because if you're hearing a band for the first time, and the material is all unfamiliar to you, if you hear them play something that you already know, and they do it well, that'll tell you right away whether or not the band's any good. So it's like a little tester.

DS: I think pretty much anybody that witnessed that band play knew that it was a good band.

FZ: Yeah. Good is probably not even the best (laughs) word to use here. It was a fabulous band.

DS: I though it was the most awesome musical ensemble I've ever seen.

FZ: I think that that was generally the response in Europe, too. The letters that we've gotten from there have been amazing.

DS: Did you have any problems with the brass section? I know that in an electrical environment that sometimes you can have intonation problems with lots of horn players.

FZ: The intonation problems, believe it or not, are due more to temperature of the room, than to amplification, because when the temperature goes, instruments, brass and brass wind instruments, tend to go out of tune, and they're very difficult to get back in tune, because the actual size and shape of the instrument changes. The metal expands and contracts, so that changes the intonation. Where it's really dangerous is when you're playing outdoor gigs, and the temperature swings.

DS: Having those horns really fattened up the sound. There was really some nice, lush arrangements.

FZ: I love writing for horns. It's fabulous. By the way, this guy form Germany who came here to do the interview? Also, see all these videotapes here, these interview tapes and things? He put them in order, and in doing so, was actually looking through the things and lost a few of the things. And see those little Beta tapes over there? Those are tapes of the

rehearsals and there's a series of seven tapes that show "Jesus Thinks You're A Jerk" being put together from scratch.

DS: Ooooo! Ooooo!

FZ: And I haven't even looked at it yet.

DS: Oh, that sounds great!

FZ: What I'm thinkin' is one day, if I ever get around to it, this would be the best way to show how a song starts from nothing, and then turns into this major spectacle featuring Eric Buxton. (laughs)

DS: That's a wonderful song to have that kind of a thing applied to it.

FZ: But it would take a lot of editing, because, like, seven Beta tapes is seven hours, No! It's more. I think Beta's are two hours, so maybe fourteen hours of rehearsal that has to be squeezed down so that you could see each little section being developed.

DS: Oh, that sounds great. There's a particular moment of that song that really gets me off a lot, and that is that metamorphosis of, I think it's somethin' like "Battle Hymn Of The Republic" mixed with...

FZ: "Dixie".

DS: With "Dixie", and "Old Rugged Cross", and how that changes into "Louie, Louie". (FZ laughs) That was really a sweet idea. Speaking of "Louie, Louie", that seems like sort of a joke for you, and I'll just make the guess that that's because in your early days you were in bands where lots of people seriously said, "play 'Louie, Louie'".

FZ: Well, I was also in bands when "Louie, Louie", before The Kingsmen made it into the joke that everybody recognizes now. "Louie, Louie" used to be a really cool tune, the Richard Berry version of it. It had, y'know, a nice arrangement to it, and a whole different feel to it. It wasn't until The Kingsmen version that it became the, y'know, the Animal House joke that it is right now.

EB: What happened to all of that stuff that you played for us last time that was gonna be on Stage, Volume Three? (laughter)

FZ: Well, it's gonna be on either Four or it's gonna be on Five. Four is finished. It's sitting in there. I don't throw anything away, you know that.

DS: In "Jesus Thinks You're A Jerk", and in a lot of other tunes, I guess in "Rhymin' Man" and in many other songs that you've written, there's snatches of other little music, something that strikes me as a real Charles Ives kind of thing to do, your tendency to take little musical quotes from places and work them into the arrangement, and usually I'm pretty good at identifying what those are. But in 1988, there was a couple that stumped me where I couldn't come up with a title of what they are. So maybe you can help me on these.

FZ: OK, great. Alright.

DS: In "Jesus", there's a little melody that one would associate with, in a cartoon or something, with seein' someone ride a horse. [11]

FZ: That's called the "Light Cavalry Overture" by Franz von Suppé.

DS: OK. In "Cruising For Burgers", there's the little Hawaiian melody, which you did in a, not with the kind of a rhythm that one would normally think of it being... [12]

FZ: It's called the "Hawaiian War Chant", and I don't know who wrote that.

DS: And how 'bout that chromatic sounding circus melody which you used...

FZ: (FZ hums the melody). [13]

DS: Exactly.

FZ: I don't know what that's called, but it's like...

DS: The famous...

FZ: Yeah, that's The Circus Lick.

DS: Exactly, but you don't know the name of it? 'Cause it's gotta have a title. It came from somewhere.

FZ: I'm sure it does, but I don't know what it is.

DS: That again, that's an aspect of your music, something that you've been doing all through your career that really gets me off a lot. I like...

FZ: Well, they're like visual aids, you know. If you think of music as somethin' to watch with your ears, then those are like visual aids. You tell a story and then you show 'em a picture and then the point gets across faster. But go through "Rhymin' Man". Did you catch all the licks in "Rhymin' Man"?

DS: Most of them, although you did an interview with somebody. . .which one of those interviews was it, Dallas or, Chattanooga, where the guy was able to catch one... [14]

RS: "Hallelujah, I'm A Bum".

DS: "Hallelujah, I'm A Bum". That one had slipped by me, so I was really glad that he got that one.

FZ: Did you get "Mississippi Mud"?

DS: No.

FZ: You didn't get that?

DS: No.

FZ: 'Dipped his hands in the doctors blood and rubbed it on his shirt like playin' with mud" (FZ hums melody which follows those lyrics) (laughs)
"It's a treat to beat your feet in the Mississippi Mud". (laughter)

DS: Oh, that's great! The more I learn about your music, the impression that I get more than any other one is the more that I know, the more I get the feeling of how much stuff there is in there that's sailing right past.

FZ: It's whizzin' right by you.

DS: Yeah, and I pride myself with being pretty good at pluckin' a lot of that stuff out of there.

FZ: The problem is, that, y'know, because I'm so old, I've heard more music, and more kinds of music than the average listener today. I lived through a whole musical area that most of the fans that listen to it now, they never heard those songs, so, y'know, things that would seem automatic to me, as a visual aid, so to speak, you'll never know. I mean, you've probably never even heard "Mississippi Mud" or...

DS: I don't know if I ever have. It's certainly nothin' I'm familiar with.

FZ: Well, one day, in an old movie, you'll hear that song, and you'll go, "Uh-oh! It's Rhymin' Man". (laughs)

DS: I'll tell ya how one of these came about for me recently, and that was I was watching a Woody Allen movie on TV, [15] and in the soundtrack of that was a jazz standard which I

heard and thought to myself, "That, that's part of 'Punky's Whips'". And I went, "What is this? What is this?" And I thought, "Well, I'll wait until the end of the movie, the credits will whiz by, and I'll be able to pluck it out." Credits whiz by and there's all these thousands of songs on it. Well, OK maybe I'll see a tape of the movie on a VCR one day, I'll be able to stop it and see what the song was.

FZ: So you wanna know what the song was?

DS: I found out what it was about a week later when I saw an American Express commercial on TV. They had somebody singing "Isn't It Romantic?"

FZ: Yeah!

DS: I went, pulled out the fake book and there it is, y'know. (FZ laughs) That's the kind of stuff that I'm convinced that your music will eternally challenge me with those kinds of things, and always keep me interested.

FZ: Well, y'know, there's a limited number of those things in there, I mean, it's like, everything I write isn't riddled with that, but certain types of songs, especially ones with vocals, when you need to put in a little musical joke, that's the resource that you draw on.

DS: Yeah, well that's an aspect of your music that I really enjoy. You did a new instrumental in Europe, [16] which we don't really have a defined title on yet, which maybe was called "The Dessicated Number", or "The Dessicated Texture", or something like that.

FZ: Yeah, it's called "Dessicated", or "Berlin", 'cause it was written in Berlin.

DS: How do you feel about the way that that turned out? Were you satisfied with any of those performances and such, or...

FZ: Well, it was never done perfectly, but there is a version that has been edited together that I could play for you that's pretty good. It was only played three or four times.

DS: And I understand that at the same time, Mike tells me that you were writing some other little pieces that you were, I suppose you were composing these while you were traveling?

FZ: Yeah.

DS: And he tells me that you composed several other little things that happened, um ... in a package with all these.

FZ: Yeah, there were chord things for the horns. I would write the composition, copy out the parts in the afternoon, and then go to the soundcheck, give 'em the parts, and say, "OK. During, say, 'King Kong' or, uh, one of those songs..."

DS: Right. "Pound For A Brown" or something like that.

FZ: Yeah. Something like that. "Y'know, when I give you the cue just start playing this". And that's how they were used.

DS: These songs like "Pound For A Brown" or "King Kong" or "Dessicated Number", the ones that had the extended "outside" part that comes in the middle of the song. In my experiences of going stop to stop and seein' those shows, that was the part of the concert that I would really look forward to, night after night.

FZ: But see, you're weird. I mean, most people that come to the concerts think that that's the boring stuff and hurry up and sing me a song that I recognize off the album.

DS: Like "Dinah-Moe Humm".

FZ: Yeah. And so, you know you gotta entertain everybody there to a certain degree, and so you can't go and play a whole concert of that outside kind of stuff. Otherwise, you alienate most of the audience.

DS: How successful did you think that that kind of outside stuff was? Did that getcha off very much?

FZ: When it worked, it worked great. And when it didn't, it was ugly (laughter) I mean, same as any other chancetaking...

DS: That's sort of the nature of that kind of music.

FZ: That's right, but I'll take the chance, so long as the audience knows that what's happening in there is a bunch of guys on stage taking a chance, then they'll appreciate it more if it turns out to be something interesting, and if it turns out to be something not interesting, though they should at least appreciate the fact that we took a chance.

DS: Right. Again, getting back to the synclavier, some of the stuff, some of the ways that that worked in with that part of the show it was truly spectacular. In being familiar with the stuff that you've done with synclavier before that
tour started, and then finding out, reading the press release that you were gonna be takin' it with you on the road, I was real curious as to just how it was
going to be integrated into the proceedings, and I thought it was spectacularly used in that stuff. I thought it sounded great.

FZ: Well, actually I've added more equipment to the system, and put some software and some hardware improvements into it, so if there were ever an. occasion to take it on a stage again, it's capable of doing even more ridiculous stuff.

DS: It's kind of funny, because every time you talk about what you've been doing with the synclavier, you tend to say, "Oh, the stuff that I did just a little while ago, that's all obsolete."

FZ: Well, it's not obsolete, but you know, they put out sometimes two software releases per year and each software release gives you a chance to do something more refined to the compositions that are already in there. For example, the composition is more than just the melody line, the chords, and the rhythm, in order to make a performance out of it, even an electronic performance, there's all the essence of style, all the texture of the notes, every note that's in there, whether it's just a group of notes that are being hit as a chord, each one of them should have it's own identity and all the different notes in a melody, they should all be different amplitude, and like that, and when I first got the system you couldn't do that to what you wrote. You could only put in the pitches, the rhythm, and the chords, and you couldn't really...

DS: Now you can get into things like aspects of phrasing and stuff like that.

FZ: That's right. And so, the new software allows you to give it a better texture and a better feel, and so I think it has more of a musical feel to it when you do these things. And consequently, I'd gone back to the things that I wrote when I first got the machine, years ago, and have updated them using the new software. So now I'm finding things that, earlier compositions that finally should come out on some kind of a release, some way, that started off as very basic things but with the software updates, they're now converted into something that's more musical.

DS: Do you think it's gotten enough to placate those people who call it "cold" and "mechanical" and all that?

FZ: Well, no, they'll always hate it because it comes out of a machine, just because that's their blind spot. The way to look at the synclavier is that it's a new type of musical medium,

and let's extend that concept to all music done with sampling and sequencing machines. You know, the more numbers you type in, the more expression you get into it because basically, that's all you're doing, just changing values, durations, amplitude, pitch and so forth, and it's just a matter of how many numbers can you stand to type in? And how big is your memory capacity to hold all those numbers. As the speed and the capacity of the machines change, it makes it possible for a composer to get closer and closer to some sort of an ideal, and that's what I spend most of my time doing.

DS: Somethin' else I'm curious about, needless to say you've had lots of complaints with what orchestras have done with your music, the situation
where you don't get enough rehearsal time and orchestras that don't give a shit enough about it to do the job right.

FZ: You gotta understand that, I'm not sayin' musicians are villains, because there's a matter of economics. How can a musician really care if the orchestra committee doesn't care enough to spend the money to rehearse it? You're sitting in an orchestra, maybe you wanna do a good job, but a guy says, "OK. You got two rehearsals. Learn this." You can't learn it. If you really cared, your heart would break, because you didn't learn it. Now you're forced to play it, and you're gonna go out there, and you stand a good chance of ruining somebody's reputation, because of what you're going to do. So, it's a defense mechanism. The musicians have to say, "Well, it's just a job."

DS: Do you think it's possible to overcome all the problems associated with dealing with orchestras, the economics of them, and all those other problem aspects of working with orchestras by...

-- CUT IN TAPE --

DS: I'm rollin'. I'm not rollin'. Now I'm rollin'.

FZ: You're rollin'.

DS: The wheels are turnin'.

FZ: If ya wanna have a world of well performed orchestra music, you're gonna have to spend the money to do it. Now, where ya gonna get the money? Well, you know, if you were to shut down some of these places that make tritium for nuclear warheads, which we don't really need, you could have one hell of a musical culture in the United States just by shutting down ... one! ... of those facilities, which is making the environment polluted, and it is questionable whether we really need, we got plenty of nuclear warheads. We could blow up the world five times over right now. Why do we need to make more of this stuff? I'm baffled.

DS: Well, I guess the reason is perhaps because by doing something sane and reasonable as something artistic like music is not gonna line the pockets of those people whose pockets are getting lined by tritium plants and all that other stuff.

FZ: I guess you just answered the question. (laughter) So every time you hear a report about defense contractors, just think of them as the enemy of music.

DS: Definitely, or any of the kind of stuff that would tend to enhance life and the pleasure of life, and all that kind of stuff, 'cause...

FZ: These people, they're in the death business. But it pays. It pays big.

DS: Almost drive ya to religion, huh?

FZ: Yeah, well I think it has driven some people to religion. The fact of the matter is that that almost costs more than the defense business, by the time you get done puttin' your contributions in.

DS: Who's your favorite TV evangelist? Who's your favorite, and your least favorite, and why?

FZ: In terms of what?

DS: In terms of anything.

FZ: Performance?

DS: Yeah! Let's say that.

FZ: The best performer is, no question, Jimmy Swaggart. This guy is a real showman. Also, Pat Robertson is a tremendous showman, but I also think that he qualifies as one of the most heinous individuals on the planet, just because of some of the things that he's saying. It's just so two-faced.

DS: He's pretty dangerous.

FZ: Well, let's say you subtract all the religious content from what Robertson says. Just from an ethical and moral standpoint, I believe that what he preaches is questionable. He's really a situational ethics kinda guy. He's a stinker. And Swaggart, to me is not quite as dangerous, but just as heinous.

DS: I think Robert Tilton kind of pushes my button because of his particular approach of...

FZ: Prosperity?

DS: Of sucking the money from the people who can afford it the least.

FZ: He's a unique individual, but he's not well known nationwide.

DS: He seems like kind of a small fry compared to some of these other guys. I also just recently came across one that's new to me, a guy named Larry Lea. I wonder if you know of him?

FZ: Wait a minute. Is he from Orange County?

DS: No, he's another one of those from Texas. His whole thing is he's goin' to war against the devil and all of his rhetoric...

FZ: Prayer warriors?

DS: Prayer warriors!

FZ: Oh yeah. I've seen him. He's been on Oral Roberts' show. They almost formed a coalition (laughter) at one time, because he was offering this binder, like this, like instructions on how to become a prayer warrior that he was selling for forty or fifty dollars.

DS: That sounds like the guy.

FZ: Yeah, I've seen him. Nice racket. He charges you money to show you how to pray. And the idea is it's kind of like a chain letter, I guess, or ... Robertson has something like this where he urges groups of people to all pray for the same thing in order to bring about change. One of the more recent things that I saw him advise people to do is to save the United States from homosexuals. We're gonna pray for the death of queers sort of a thing, y'know. He didn't really say it like that, but that kind of an attitude.

DS: That's the underlying intent.

FZ: Yeah. Well, we don't really want 'em to die, but we certainly wouldn't cry very much if they did.

DS: Well, let's get back to music. It's definitely a better subject, as far as I'm concerned.

EB: Do you have any more ornaments?

FZ: Boxes. But first, one should turn on the lights to see whether or not they actually work.

EB: Where's the plug?

FZ: Isn't there a Waber strip down there in the corner? There should be a plug on the wall. Ladies and gentlemen, for those of you who don't know what's going on right now, the dynamic Eric Buxton is actually gonna attempt to plug in these Christmas lights he's hung on my wizened and miserable little Christmas tree here in the basement. Was that it? Yeah.

RS: What did you think about the sentence that Jimbo [Bakker] got?

FZ: Too light.

RS: Too light, huh?

FZ: Yeah.

RS: Well, one day they'll all get caught.

FZ: Well, if we're lucky.

DS: If we're lucky, yeah.

RS: Don't ya think Tammy shoulda gotten some time too?

FZ: Well, no, not really, because I don't see that she broke any law, I mean, I can't say that I have any affection for Tammy Faye, but she wasn't the financial brains of the institution. Basically, he was being sent to jail for doing a criminal act, not because he was, y'know....

DS: For stealin' people's money.

FZ: Yeah, I mean, I don't see any proof that Tammy Faye stole anybody's money. If she had, then she oughta go, but...

RS: Yeah, well, she sorta lived the lifestyle off of it, though.

FZ: Yeah, but I don't know whether that's against the law, see? I think that it would have been pushing the case to bring her in as an accomplice. I think they made a stronger case by aiming it at him, because he was actually the boss of the operation. I think that...

EB: Your fire extinguisher here...? (Eric plugs in twinkling Christmas tree lights)

DS: Ta-duh!

FZ: Alright! Now they're twinkling! Very Good! (laughter) That's not bad just the way it is, Eric. (Lights go out) Ooops! Uh-oh! (laughter)

RS: Shake your ornaments. [17]

FZ: (laughs) Yeah! I remember that!

EB: (begins to sing) Oh, I'm so poor, oh, I'm so poor...

FZ: (laughs) It's the Killer Christmas Tree! Y'know, I've got a tape copy of that show someplace around here, the Killer Christmas Tree...

DS: Oh, your fans pass that one around.

FZ: Yeah?

DS: Yeah.

FZ: That looks good! In fact, in its way, it looks kinda better than the one upstairs.

EB: The lights are really getting really like, more psychedelic in the last few years, have you noticed?

FZ: Yeah!

EB: They're not just blinkin'. They're chasin' each other...

FZ: Yeah! (laughter)

EB: This one has a control on it.

FZ: A speed control? (Eric increases the Christmas tree light blink-rate) Oooooo! (much laughter by all) There's some bad brown acid goin' around Eric! (much laugher)

EB: No, that's New Years Eve.

FZ: That's a little bit too fast. That's not a restful twinkle. Slow that sucker down a little.

DS: If you get that at the right frequency, you'll induce somebody to have an epileptic fit, y'know...

FZ: I had no idea that it had a rate control... (Eric reduces the rate) OK! That's real good!

EB: That is nice!

FZ: It is.

DS: You guys did this medley called "Orange County Lumber Truck". At the end of that came the section from "Lumpy Gravy". I understand that that part of "Lumpy Gravy" was originally written as part of Captain Beefheart And The Grunt People.

FZ: That was the theme for Captain Beefheart vs. The Grunt People.

DS: Are there any other pieces of music that we might recognize as from albums or shows and whatnot that also were conceived as part of that, that you can think of?

FZ: From Captain Beefheart? Not that we performed. There were other tunes from Captain Beefheart.

DS: I'll give you an example. Like, we would recognize "Duke Of Prunes" as being part of the soundtrack to Run Home Slow, and when you listen to the soundtrack to that, you can definitely pluck that out. I just wondered, as part of Captain Beefheart and The Grunt People, if there's any other...

FZ: Oh. Things like that?

DS: Things like that that we would recognize as ... under some other title.

FZ: Well, yes, as a matter of fact, the legendary Gerald Fialka gave me as a birthday present a tape copy of The Worlds Greatest Sinner, and there is some music in there which actually resides in the Uncle Meat album.

DS: Do you remember what?

FZ: Well, I remember the cue is something with a lot of sixteenth notes in it, sextuplets that had something to do with, uh, it's been so long since I saw the movie, it was for a plane taking off, and that part was used, and also, the trail of blood sequence in World's Greatest Sinner, where the guy stabs the host and there's supposed to be a trail of blood on the lawn. That was called "Blood Unit", in the scoring list, and that whole unit was done with electric instruments for Uncle Meat, but I can't remember what I called it. I know it's in the album. I can't remember what I called it.

DS: I have a tape [audio] copy of that too. I'll go back and listen to that, think of what that is. Let's talk about A. West. He was pretty cool doin' his preacher thing. How did your involvement with him come about? Did you meet him as somebody who was gonna illustrate for your book, or meet him and find out that he was an illustrator, also? How did that come about?

FZ: Well, first I was doing business with a printing company that showed me these things (FZ hands Den a book of "Rev. A. West World Salvation stamps") 'cause they had done some work for A. West.

DS: Reverend A. West World Salvation stamps. . .these are great! (laughs)

FZ: Take 'em!... Uh, then I was introduced to him by Jeff Stein, who worked on Dweezil's "My Guitar Wants To Kill Your Mama" video. And then I saw some of his work. He did some logos for me and some other illustrations. He did the album cover for Broadway The Hard Way, and then he did illustrations for the book.

DS: The work he did on your book was really fantastic.

FZ: That took a long time.

DS: Yeah, and there was a unity of all of those things. It was...

FZ: Well, the way that was done was he'd come over here and we'd go chapter by chapter through the book, and I'd tell him my ideas for what oughta be, y'know, how to illustrate what I was talking about. Then he would do sketches, and some of 'em were not approved by the publisher. They wouldn't let him put some of the things in there.

DS: So there was some things that you guys wanted to have in there that didn't make it?

FZ: Yeah. One of the problems was the publisher was very adamant about the size of the book. It only had to be a certain number of pages. Some of the other decisions as to what to leave out were based on, they felt the illustrations were in bad taste, or something like that. And there's nothin' that I could do about it because it's not my publishing company.

DS: I noticed that there certainly was continuity among all those...

FZ: The Nu-Perfect America Company...

DS: Yeah. There was that and the Frank Zappa with the clothing from the back cover photo, and all that...

FZ: Yeah.

DS: But just in the way that the style that he drew those illustrations, and such. There was an element of continuity throughout that I found really pleasing. I just thought he did a really outstanding job.

FZ: Well, so you'll understand, it's another one of those things like "Mississippi Mud" that you don't know about. The whole illustrational style in there is derived from a type of cartoon approach that was in American popular literature in the early part of the century. It's got that, the whole old-fashioned type of illustration to it. So it's a parody of that kind of Americana that he's doing.

DS: Yeah, I'd love to talk to him about that. He did a very good job. Hmm... oh yeah! In, I think Stuttgart, [18] you did somethin' called "Star Wars Won't Work"...

FZ: Oh yeah...

DS: And something that perhaps was commonly called "Stairway To Star Wars"...

FZ: Yes.

DS: That whole thing was pretty outlandish. Was that a military audience you were playing to there? I know that there's the air base where they had that spectacular crash and all that. [19]

FZ: Um, no. As a matter of fact, one of the interesting things about our European audience, especially in Germany, when we first started playing in Germany, we had a large part of the audience in certain cities that were close to U.S. installations, where the

G.I.s would come to the shows. In some cases it would be thirty to forty percent of the audience would be G.I.s. So we looked forward to doing those cities because we could do more songs where we could talk to the audience, 'cause we knew people understood what we were talking about. We had some fairly amusing experiences in that kind of situation. I'll tell you one in a minute, but today, when we play in Germany, the bulk of the audience that comes to see us is German. We have a very low turnout of U.S. servicemen, because today, U.S. servicemen like heavy metal. They don't like what we do. They would go to see just about any heavy metal band before they would come to see us. But in a way, that, to me, is flattering, that the audience for what we do in Germany really is German. At the Stuttgart performance, there were four officers that came to the show, 'cause I talked to them backstage.

DS: U.S. officers?

FZ: Yeah, but there's not a whole lot of enlisted guys. On the way to the show, we had been passed by a convoy of U.S. military vehicles. You know, you like to think of the military as a highly disciplined, well-oiled machine, OK? Well, let me tell you what we saw. There was this one truck goin' by, and these guys, they were relaxin' in the cab. They had their feet up on the thing. There were Coca-Cola cans rolling around, (laughter) I mean, these guys, it was like party time, and they're drivin' down the freeway next to our bus. I could see in there what was goin' on in the cab, and I made mention of this to these officers. I said, "Hey! What kinda army we got over here? Russians come rollin' through here, what are you guys gonna do, look for the Coke machine?" (laughter) They said that they would look into it. (laughter) We've noticed that the .it's gotta be difficult to be a U.S. serviceman, to be stationed there. It doesn't look like there's ever gonna be a ground war with any Russians rolling through. I think we can safely rule that out, and these guys who are there, in a country where they can't speak the language, and generally not that well-received by the people that are around them. They're isolated. It's gotta be very difficult to be stuck there with or without your family, just to be stuck there, and sayin' to yourself, "What the fuck am I doing here?"

DS: I've known people who have been sent over there, and that's what they felt.

FZ: Yeah, so I'm not tryin' to criticize them because I certainly wouldn't wanna trade jobs with them. But over the years, we've seen a deterioration in the behavior of the military guys who would come to the show. They're really either totally drunk or totally wrecked, and just, the pressure gets to 'em and they leave the base to come to our shows just to be in the presence of'
somebody who's speaking english to 'em and rocking out on stage, they lose control, and in one instance we were playing in Ludwigshafen and there was a guy, at the end of the show, a U.S. serviceman, and I don't know what he was on...

DS: On this last tour?

FZ: No. This was '81, '80 or '81. [20] He came to the barrier right at the encore, and took off, this is freezing cold, by the way. We're in a freezing, cold place. He takes off all of his clothes, he's buck naked, and he's jacking off in front of the stage (laughter) and the MPs came and got him, wrapped him in a blanket and took him away. Yeah. (laughs)

DS: That's pretty extreme.

FZ: It's extreme. If you think for a good time you gotta come to one of my shows, and jack off in front of the stage (laughter) buck naked in a freezing room, if that's your idea of a good time, I think that that's pretty stressful.

EB: Military training.

DS: You think maybe this has anything to do with the fact that perhaps, years ago, when you were getting more servicemen who seemed to be enjoying the music and not so extremed out on alcohol or whatever, it seems to me that maybe back then was when there was the draft. So maybe they were just suckin' people in from the general population and some of those might have been more regular folks, as opposed to the kind of a person who would go, "Yeah, [I wanna join the army!]"

FZ: "I need that." Yeah. Well, that's true. That's a good point. But the other thing is that the deterioration has occured during the Reagan administration.

DS: Yeah, as so many other things have deteriorated during that time.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: Alright. We'll go with some continuity here. I'll just read this: The next day in Mannheim, [21] you guys did a particularly bent show in which "Cornhole" was liberally used as the secret word. The show also had yet another performance of...

FZ: "Stairway To Cornhole".

DS: "Stairway To Cornhole".

FZ: It may delight you to know that I edited those two versions together, so I have a combination Cornhole/Star Wars version of "Stairway To Heaven"
(laughter) which will probably never be released.

DS: Why won't it be released? Because of, again, copyright aspects and such?

FZ: Yeah. See, if you're going to perform somebody's song, and you don't change the words, all you get is a mechanical license, but if you change any of the words, you need their permission, and indications are, so far, that the song has special significance to the authors, and they don't wanna have the words changed. So when we finally do put out "Stairway To Heaven", it will not have the words changed.

DS: OK. I'll continue here. The day after that, the solo in "Willie The Pimp" was substituted with [Wagner's] "Flight Of The Valkyrie" going into "Purple Haze".

FZ: Right, which was a real utter disaster, because it wasn't exactly the day after that.

DS: I think so. [22]

FZ: It was? Because y'see "Purple Haze" was rehearsed in Linz [23] and the only tape we have of a good performance of "Purple Haze" was from that soundcheck in Linz...

DS: That was what Mike had told me, yeah.

FZ: And that's really good. That's been edited together, by the way, and that'll finally appear in an album. I remember that some cue got messed up at that concert. It was in a town called Fürth, and we had to bail out of that when I went into a loop guitar solo, which ended that disastrous part of the show.

DS: It seems to me that, like, those three shows, Stuttgart, Mannheim, and Fürth were really, a lot of pretty peculiar stuff certainly happening with the lyrics and just in terms of weird things like this being introduced into the show...

FZ: Probably 'cause it was our last show in Germany.

DS: I was just wondering if there was any particular reason that you can think of, why it seemed like there seemed to be an abundance of zaniness that just sort of cropped up during that three-day period. Anything you can remember?

FZ: The secret word guys over there, these two guys Dirk Tom and Tommy, and they were followin' us all around Germany, and every day there'd be the sign, "What's the secret

word for tonight?" And you hate to disappoint 'em. You can't have a show without some kind of a secret word (laughter).

DS: The secret word definitely was brought to new highs during that tour, huh?

FZ: That's true.

DS: "Tell Me You Love Me" kind of has gone through some evolutions. Obviously, it evolved into "Why Don't You Like Me". Before that in '84, there was somethin' sort of in-between...

FZ: "Don't Be A Lawyer". [24]

DS: "Don't Be A Lawyer". (FZ laughs) I'm not really too familiar with the lyrics of that, but what's the basic gist of... I know what the other two mean. I'm familiar with those lyrics, but what's the basic gist of "Don't Be A Lawyer"? What's that song about?

FZ: Well, basically we have too many lawyers in the United States, and most of the things that are wrong with the, well, let's look at it this way. If you had the belief that living, when you, let's see, how do I say this? Let's say you're a regular person and you have a regular life and you just wanna do your regular stuff. Hanging over your head is the possibility that you could run afoul of the law, laws which you don't even know exist. There's always a chance that the government, in some way, is going to give you a bad time. This leads to the belief, the widespread belief, I feel in the United States, that the average guy can't get a fair deal, because there is no fair deal available anymore, and that always, there lurks the possibility that in order for you to survive, just to stay out of jail or to stay out of bankruptcy, you're gonna have to use the services of a lawyer. Well, the lawyer is not your friend, because the lawyers are the people who created the situation where there are so many laws that it makes your life miserable. It's a self-perpetuating monstrosity, and we have too many lawyers dispensing bad law, actually participating in the creation of bad law at the point where they become legislators. I think that it's time for some social engineering to steer people away from the legal profession. There are just too many lawyers for our own good. These guys have to earn a living, too, and so you wind up with people suggesting that you sue somebody else. That's how they earn their money, by generating paperwork. You will pay them money
to make somebody else's life miserable and vice-versa. That's what's lurking beneath the surface of American life right now.

DS: It's a (Den pronounces it wrong) litigious society.

FZ: Yeah. You pronounce it litigious.

DS: Litigious. Thank you. This makes me think of something. You said quite a lot of times that you don't like to read, but yet you're obviously a well-learned person, and most people, in my experience, who are well-learned, are people who have read a lot. How does that work out in your case?

FZ: Well, I don't know how I do it. I watch television, and I see the same shit on television that you do. I don't watch any special programs...

DS: I'll sort of flip that around. As I said. Most people, in my experience, who watch lots of television wind up being pretty pedestrian in their thought processes, perhaps as a result. Obviously, in your case....

FZ: There are ways to extract information from television. First of all, one of the reasons why I like Keneally so much, is because he has this fabulous ability to memorize. I have a fabulous ability to memorize, too, not the same stuff that he does, or the same way that he does it, but if I see or hear an idea, I can store a three dimensional version of that thing and recall it in unbelievable detail instantly, and it's located, you know how computers

work, how you got the hard disc, which has distant storage, and then you got the RAM section of a computer where anything connects to anything else instantly, 'cause it's faster memory. I have a large RAM capacity in my brain for, I keep those types of artifacts on line in this RAM, OK? And it works like a filter, so if I watch television, I can automatically run that piece of shit that they're broadcasting to me through this filter, and I can throw away all the propaganda, the stuff that they're tryin' to hurl at me, and find some way to extract the real data from it. That's the challenge of watching CNN, because so much of it is just bullshit. But lurking in there are some hard facts, and if you can sort them and accumulate them, once you've knocked all the bullshit off the fact, stored the fact, that becomes part of the RAM, and part of the filter, and you just constantly reapply that to all the data that's coming in. I have the ability to connect ideas and sort stuff very fast. The problem with being able to do that is, you can execute the mental gymnastics faster than you can ever explain it to somebody, what you did. So I can look at something and I can know stuff about it that it would take me so long to explain to somebody else what I already did at the point where I was, y'know, like, exposed to Eric's twinkling lights there. I already ran that through the filter (laughter) and came up with conclusions about it that, y'know, it's another thing. That's just the way my brain works. So, as far as learning stuff, when I say I don't read, it's not a hundred percent that I never pick up something and read it.

DS: Sure. Obviously.

FZ: But what I do read, I extract a lot from it, and that's what I've been able to do. The sum total of what I know is the result of 49 years of doing that to my environment.

DS: That's a thing that obviously comes in pretty handy for your abilities as a composer too, and...

FZ: It comes in handy everywhere. I'm tryin' to think of a place where it wouldn't come in handy, and it's not something that other people couldn't do. You just have to think about thinking. I wish there was a way that U.S. schools could teach people how to use their brains to do this, because it is a completely learned technique. There's nobody else in my family that does it, so it's not a genetically inherited thing. I figured out how to do it. I trained myself how to do it, and I use it all the time, and I think that you could teach somebody else how to extract data that way.

DS: Seems like it could be a pretty valuable thing if it could be taught to people in general to have.

FZ: I've thought about it. If there was a way that I could give you a formula that you could stick into your publication right now, so that everybody there could do the same thing, they'd get more out of life with effort, that's for sure. The best I can do is tell you that it is possible to do it, that you have to rearrange in your own brain the way you conduct thought processes. You have to turn your brain inward for the moment to think about, "How do I think?" You say to yourself, "What is mechanically going on when I think?" I don't think most people ever consider that. They take it for granted, that they are thinking. Now, if you wanna be thinking with a capital "T", you have to organize the way in which you do it. Just like if you wanna prepare for the Olympics, you gotta build up your muscles. If you wanna prepare for thinking, you have to clean up all the data that you've got stored in there and organize it, so that you can use it. Anybody who has ever tried to manage a database on a computer, have you ever had any computer experience?

DS: None whatsoever.

FZ: Well, the Winchester hard disc is like a box of data. It contains all of your files, all of your letters, all of the stuff that you're working on and the software that you're using to sort and manipulate the data. And then there's another part of the computer called the RAM, which is faster than the hard disc. Hard disc takes time to load. But the business end is the

RAM. The more megabytes of RAM you have, the more stuff you can do instantly, or as close to instantly as electronics will allow...

DS: The faster you can do the process.

FZ: That's right. And so, when you consider what is up here in terms of memory storage, I think they say the average guy uses ten percent of his brain. Well, nobody ever told you you couldn't use the other ninety. You may never get to a hundred percent capacity, but certainly, if you increase to eleven percent, you're ahead of the game. All you gotta do is train yourself to do it. It's not a fairy tale. It's something that I think anybody can do, but you have to have the desire to do it. Some people live their lives just to grow muscles. And other people live their lives just to lose weight. And other people live their lives just to get high. And other people live their lives just to make other people miserable. Well, believe it or not, you could live your life just to learn how to process data, and it's great. It's really fun, once you get into it.

EB: There is an actual mechanical process that goes on with the neurons. As you push them farther and farther out into areas they're not used to being in, they'll go into those areas and activate new areas...

FZ: That's right. I'm tellin' you. The important thing to remember is, "Anybody can do it." Dan Quayle became vice-president, ladies and gentlemen!
(much laughter) Anybody, (laughs) anybody. (laughs)

DS: Most anything can happen, huh? (FZ laughs)

EB: Yeah. Now George Bush is going to Colombia, where there's a thirty million dollar bounty on his head.

FZ: That's pretty cheap. Well, maybe not.

EB: But can they protect him?

FZ: That is somethin' to worry about.

DS: They should send Quayle down there.

FZ: Yeah, with a rubber mask.

DS: Let me back up here second. The mention of CNN made me remember a question that had escaped me momentarily back then, when we were talking about Jim and Tammy. I wonder if you happened to see Larry King, maybe the night after, or the night after that, that he got his sentencing. There was a show where Larry interviewed a representative of the prosecutor's office that did that case, and a representative of the PTL, a woman named, I think Sandy Galaway was her name.

FZ: Oh yes!

DS: Did you see that?

FZ: Yes, I did.

DS: Wasn't that a great one?

FZ: Oh yes!

DS: Did ya like her comment about God taking revenge with the earthquake and the hurricane? [25]

FZ: That's right! I saw it.

DS: Boy! (laughs) Larry sort of choked on that didn't he?

FZ: Well, sometimes Larry is too easy on these people. Sometimes he's harder on the callers than he is on the ones who are there in the studio.

DS: I wish he would have drawn her out on that a little...

FZ: (laughs) Yeah.

DS: 'Cause it was really goin' to somethin' pretty bizarre, but...

FZ: I think they were just on the, toward the end of the segment was when that occured.

DS: Yeah, exactly. That was what I thought. Um, let's get back to some secret words. There's a bunch of 'em that we don't know what they mean. Some of 'em are pretty obvious, but there's a bunch that we don't know. In Chicago there was one, which goes, "Llama!" What is that?

FZ: OK. Do you remember the Willie Nelson commercial? They were advertising Willie Nelson albums on television just prior to that, and one of the songs, they played just a little bit of y'know, each of these songs, and I don't even know what the name of this song is, but in it, Willie goes, "Mama!"

DS: "Mama Don't Raise Your Boys Up To Be Cowboys" or somethin' like that...

FZ: Well that's "Mama!" turned into "Llama!"

DS: And does that have anything to do with Michael Jackson's llamas?

FZ: That's right. Got it? That's how that one works.

DS: Here's another one. In Bremen, the secret word was "Xenakis mbl, mbl, mbl, mbl". [26] I know Xenakis as being the composer, I believe he's Greek, right?

FZ: Well, he's a Greek composer who lives in France, and he is an architect, by the way. That's really how he earns his living.

DS: What was the reference of his name being the secret word for that night?

FZ: OK. Remember I told ya I was doing a documentary for German television? It's all about serious composition, and the guy who did it is a guy named Henning Lohner, and Henning had been trying to reach me for months about doing this documentary. And he came to Bremen before the show to meet with me, and he told me about the other things that he'd done. He'd done a documentary on Stockhausen, Cage, and Xenakis, and on two people in contemporary theater, whose names escape me right now. We were talking backstage about Xenakis, prior to the show. That's how...

DS: It just was...

FZ: Yeah. But see the mbl, mbl, mbl, all that stuff, the early Xenakis pieces make use of repeated notes like that, as part of the texture. Different instruments repeating notes at different rates against each other. It's called "stochastic" composition.

DS: That was another question going along with that, 'cause I can remember that word being used, and I wondered what stochastic meant.

FZ: Xenakis is the stochastic school of composition. And it's spelled S-T-O-C-H-A-S-T-I-C.

DS: In Rotterdam, the secret word was "fishbone".

FZ: Prior to the concert, Bobby Martin had eaten some fish backstage, gotten a fishbone wedged in his throat and had to be taken to the hospital to have it removed.

DS: Really!?

FZ: And came onstage and sang the show that night.

DS: What a trooper. OK. Munich. "Ayee! Ayee! Ayee!"

FZ: Alright. You ever heard of Erroll Garner, jazz piano who mumbles along with what he plays?

DS: What was the famous song he wrote? A standard, um...

FZ: "Moonglow" was one of the most famous records he did.[27] Anyway, Ayee! Ayee! It's the whole concept of jazz musicians who make jazz noises while they perform. Remember?

DS: Oh, sure! Right.

FZ: Make a jazz noise here: "Ayee! (followed by other jazz noises that defy spelling)" (laughter). There's a great mix of that show. That was a good show. And that whole version of "Big Swifty"...

DS: I was gonna say, there was one of those lengthy vehicles for solos where everybody jazzes out, right?

FZ: Yeah, totally jazzed out, and Bobby Martin does this keyboard solo and he's..."(more unspellable jazz noise)" along with his solo in the middle of it (laughs) he says, "What key are we in, A or A flat?"

DS: Sayin' a bunch of stuff like "Cooloh, Daddy-o", and a bunch of stuff like that.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: Alright. Montpelier. The secret word was "jewelry".

FZ: Jewelry ... I'm drawin' a blank on that. It had to have something to do with somethin' that one of the guys in the band did, or bought.

DS: I know some of these are obscure, y'know, so...

FZ: Well, fairly obscure for me, too.

DS: Grenoble was "Hoops And Poops".

FZ: Hoops and poops?

DS: You guys said it a whole bunch of times.

FZ: That was probably derived from a mistake that Bobby made in one of the vocals. Sometimes the secret word will get going just because somebody will fuck up a song, and then you keep, you use the fuck-up as the secret word. 'Cause you don't always go on stage with a word in mind. Sometimes the shows won't have any at all. Things just get suggested, so the first part of the show could be really bland, and the second part could be outrageous depending on what popped up.

DS: Yeah, I saw how in Philadelphia, how after Chad did his rendition of "The Love Boat", that that wound up...

FZ: The Love Boat show?

DS: Yeah. That wound up coming out several times. I've mentioned this to you before, but I was the guy who gave you the heart and the list and stuff like that, and again, I'm eternally grateful for what happened as a result of that. I mean, that really...

FZ: The list of things to do on stage? The a cappella and all?

DS: Yeah. That was pretty cool stuff. Particularly, conducting the audience, where did your idea of doing that ... I know that you've been doing that for years, too. Is that just somethin' you thought up, or somethin'? How did you come about doin' that? That's my particular favorite, one of my favorite things you do.

FZ: There's a school of European composition that deals with music as texture. Like Penderecki. Some of his stuff would fall into that, where it's not about the melody and the chords. It's about, if you take a group of instruments, and you have them doing different kinds of things all at the same time, it creates something that's more than a chord. It's a texture. It's a sound that's crawling with texture and it's wiggling. And it seemed to me that when an audience applause occurs, there's like, random texture, all the different beats are going at different rates, and that makes this one big sound that's called "Applause". But if you control the rate of the clapping or the location of the clapping you could use the sound of the applause as a musical thing. So I tried it one night and the audience liked it...

DS: Working it around the room and such and getting the stereo out of it.

FZ: Yeah. I think the first time I did that was '72 or '73.

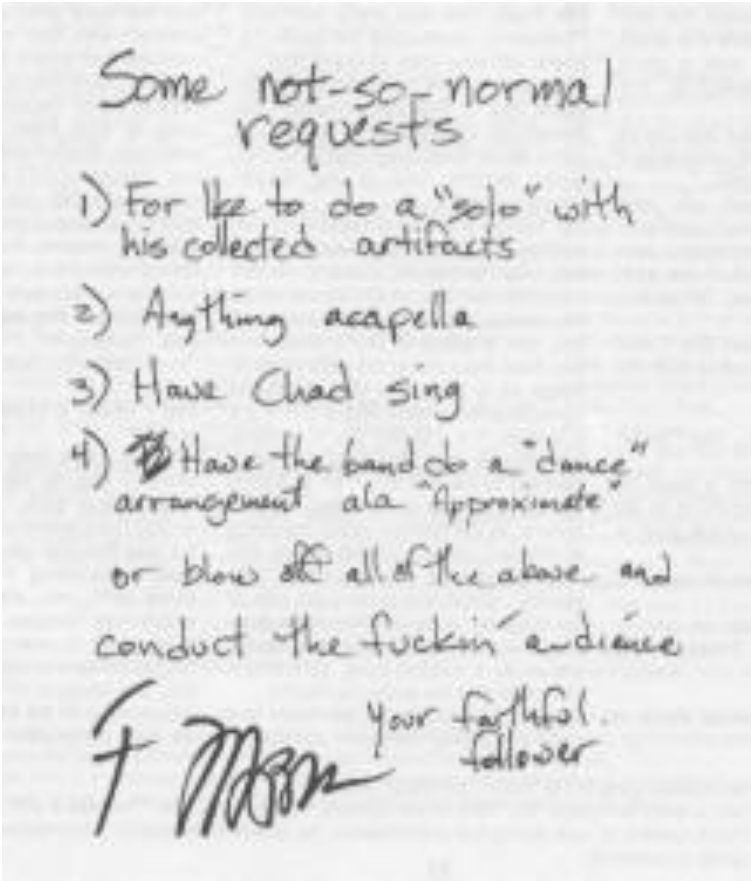
DS: I'm really glad that you happened to put some of that on Jazz From Hell [Den meant to say Video From Hell] because that gave me the opportunity to talk to people who aren't really familiar with your music and go, "There's this thing that Frank does," and show them with the videotape of just what that is. That particular show illustrated it rather well.

FZ: But it didn't illustrate sound texture 'cause it was mono. But if you could hear it in stereo, and you hear this ... this thing that's flying around the room. I actually have some four-track takes of the band with Jean-Luc Ponty where this was done, and you can really hear that it's a usable texture. But the best example, and I don't know where this tape is, someplace in the vault, it's from a concert in '78 or '79 in southern Illinois. We were playing at this college, and the place that they had us playing at, it was the worst conceivable venue. We were on the floor of an arena, OK, and we were playing directly into a concrete wall, like, we were facing a concrete wall maybe twenty feet away, and then, thirty feet up is where the audience starts (laughter) and then it goes up from there like that, so you can't look straight ahead and see anyone, (laughter) OK? And in this absolutely impossible place to play, we decided to do one of these audience participation textures, that's where I had, first I divided the audience into five sections, and told each section that they were going to sing a part of the song. It was "Lohengrin", "Rite Of Spring", "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida" and "Harbor Lights"...

DS: I heard a cheezy tape of this, yeah! [28]

FZ: And since they didn't know the tunes, I had to hum them, y'know, "This is your tune..." and then conducted them in and out doing this. And the way that that was taped, we didn't have a recording truck then. It was taped with one stereo microphone which was hanging from the lighting truss. And, it was recorded with a Nagra, so there's a two-track master of this, and because of the location at the microphone at the height of the thing, we got a pretty good recording of what this actual audience effect was, and if I ever find that tape, I'll try and stick it in You Can't Do That On Stage, 'cause it's a pretty bizarre event.

Audience Participation
2/14/88 Philadelphia, Penn.
Photo by Scott Yobp



Some not-so-normal requests

1) For Ike to do a "solo" with his collected artifacts
2) Anything acapella
3) Have Chad sing
4) Have the band do a "dance" arrangement ala "Approximate"

or blow off all of the above and conduct the fuckin' audience

Your faithful follower

DS: Yeah. I imagine that the best place to be, to be able to hear that is front and center on the stage, it seems that all the sound would be directed toward that place.

FZ: Well, probably no. Probably the best place to hear it would be maybe thirty feet ahead of where I stand out over the audience up high. Then you get a better global picture of it,

because where I stand, a lot of what I hear is coming out of the side-fill monitors and my own monitor box.

DS: I just wonder whether or not it would be a real, certainly I imagine it would be a challenge to try to set up you know, while a tour's happening, try to take a specific occasion of doing that experiment, and trying to get the optimum recording of it.

FZ: You can't because there's always one guy in the audience who doesn't want to, you know, he's gonna yell "Dinah-Moe Humm" no matter what happens. And that's part of reality.

DS: That's true.

FZ: Because a couple of times I tried to do that just to get a sample of it for the synclavier and you can't make the audience behave. You know, they're there for a good time, they're not there to record.

DS: Sure, and they sell beer in the lobby.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: What are the signals you use? I'm familiar with some of them.. Like I know that that essentially means "get ready." And that's the "high" sound. That's the "low" sound. What other ones do you have?

FZ: Well if I go like this, that's "play reggae." If I go like that it's "play ska."

DS: Right.

FZ: Um ... is eleven.

DS: Eleven, sure.

FZ: And ... is thirteen. And stuff like that.

DS: I've seen your "A" chord or...

FZ: Yeah, it goes "C" and you go "A".

DS: Do you do any other chords besides that? I've seen you do "C" and "A".

FZ: No.

DS: It seems that those are easy ones that the hand would accommodate.

EB: Mariachi?

FZ: Oh yeah, and this is "Weather Report."

DS: How do you do some of these other things I've heard, "Mr. Rogers"?

FZ: Oh God, what was the signal for Mr. Rogers? I point to my shoe.

DS: That's pretty funny stuff. OK, back to secret words ... shellfish.

FZ: Um... that was Paris.

DS: Yeah.

FZ: And um, somebody had gotten ill, from eating shellfish. And so, there had been some discussion about this is one of the things you don't want to do when you're on the road is go out and gorge yourself on raw oysters in places where the bacteria count is high in the water. Like you want to commit suicide? Eat oysters in Naples. Because the raw sewerage that's dumped into the...

DS: Right, yeah ... yeah. OK, we briefly mentioned "cornhole" from Mannheim. You said something about that, but I don't recall how that, what that was about.

FZ: I don't know how that one came up. I mean cornhole is one of those traditional stupid, uh ... uh, playground humor words. Playground psychotic words.

DS: You used it quite alot that particular evening.

FZ: Yeah. Well that's what the secret word is for. You just abuse it. How far can you take it? How many times can you stick in the wrong word in the middle of a song and literally change the meaning of the song?

DS: Do you think that doing that alienates many people in the audience who don't know what the fuck is going on?

FZ: Well I know on one occasion it gave us one of the worst reviews we ever got of a concert and it certainly baffled and alienated a large portion of the audience in Paris when in '82, or no '84, the secret word was "Danger Will Robinson." You know from Lost In Space?

DS: Yeah, we just saw a snatch of that on television this morning.

FZ: Well it's like the way Robbie the Robot's arms go, well they go like this. (laughter) They just flop around like that. And we were joking about that at the soundcheck and I remembered it and it cracked me up so much that through the whole show all I had to do is just a little of this and Ike was falling all over the place, (laughter) and we really had a great time with it on stage, but the French critics thought that it was just this horrible show.

DS: They didn't understand.

FZ: They had no idea what it was and so we were, to use one of the words made popular by Jane Fonda, we were excoriated for doing Lost In Space.

DS: Right. Alright I got one last one ... which is from Graz which is "hairpiece."

FZ: Oh, did you ever see that Cheech and Chong movie where they play these two Arab brothers?

EB: The Corsican Brothers?

FZ: No, not the Corsican Brothers. They play these two Arab guys.

RS: Hairpiece, I need a new hairpiece.

FZ: Yeah. That's what it was, that's right.

DS: So I'll have to see the movie to understand that.

RS: Wait. Before you go off the secret word, do you remember the second show in Rotterdam where it started off with you introducing the band and talked about how Ed Mann had screwed up the lick?

FZ: That's right.

RS: And then the secret word became about rehearsal.

FZ: Well the thing is that was the first show in the tour where the band really let me down. They really started to play wrong notes. Unexcusable wrong notes. And I started talking about, "What," you know "maybe we should rehearse more." And for two or three days on the tour everybody had their nose out of joint like I have no right to tell them that they're playing wrong notes, of course they were playing. And in Europe people listen to the notes. They're more interested in musically what you're doing. [To Jim Nagle as he is leaving] Have a nice holiday.

JN: It's six below in Chicago.

FZ: Well you're asking for it. You're going back there with fuckin' laryngitis. They're going to send you back in a casket draped with a flag. Be careful. Did you know what the CNN Report said? The coldest day of the century.

JN: When, yesterday?

FZ: Yeah. It's that fuckin' ozone layer.

JN: But I'll call tomorrow and see if Gail has that name. OK, goodbye. Nice to meet you, thanks.

EB, DS, RS: Goodbye, thanks, take care.

DS: OK. Did Harry Andronis ever get his equipment wet?

FZ: Oh yeah.

DS: Good for Harry. During a rehearsal in Boston you were fiddling around with a tune and I asked you what it was and you told me it was an R&B tune called "Diddley Daddy". Who was that done by?

FZ: Yeah, Bo Diddley.

DS: During "Torture Never Stops / Lonesome Cowboy Burt" quite often there were these references to Tom Petty being the "butt-ugliest human being known to rock and roll." Where did that come from?

FZ: That was a line that Ed threw in one night.

DS: Something that he made up?

FZ: Yeah, unless he got it from someplace else, but it wasn't my idea. That's Ed's comment.

DS: You described "I Left My Heart in San Francisco" as being one of the ugliest songs ever written. What makes that song ugly?

FZ: Oh, I'm just joking, that's not the ugliest. I think "Happy Birthday" is one of the ugliest songs ever written. (laughter) That was a comment from the Munich show, where we got the audience to sing along with it.

DS: I have this one as being from ... one of the ugliest, maybe it was from Munich where the audience...

FZ: Sang it.

DS: ... Actually liked it and you did it twice or they had them singing it...

FZ: Oh then that was ... one place where they really liked it, yeah. I can't remember what city that was, but in Munich I asked the audience to sing along and then I said "Ayee! That was ugly as fuck." No, "I think that was ugly as fuck." That's what it was.

DS: That was the "jazz" night?

FZ: Yeah.

DS: In Springfield and in Burlington you were poking fun at Eric because of his shoes. What's significant about Eric's shoes?

FZ: They're very, very large.

DS: What size are they Eric?

EB: Thirteen.

DS: Yeah, they are large, thirteens!

EB: Oh right, but I had lost them. I had left them at the hotel before that. That's what that was. I leave stuff all over the place.

DS: In Portland, something happened that brought on the song "Stainless the Maiden". Tell me again, because I've heard a cheezy tape of this so I have to use my imagination.

FZ: A girl walked up to the stage and handed us a Christian songbook. And so I thumbed through it and handed it to Bobby Martin to sight-read it. And
that's how "Stainless, the Maiden" got in the show.

DS: It's hard for me to imagine a Christian song called "Stainless the Maiden". Pretty bizarre.

FZ: Well, that's why it's in the show. (laughter) If you're gonna pick a Christian song how about "Stainless the Maiden", huh? (laughter)

DS: In Providence you told the audience that the local police there believe in the devil, that it said so on TV that evening. Do you remember what that news story was about? I assume it was a news story.

FZ: It was. I had done an interview prior to the show with some local television station and they're the ones who told me that they had a Satanism squad (laughter) or something related but with the police and Satanism. It's just ridiculous.

DS: That is ridiculous. Although your efforts to register voters was greatly successful, there were some problems. Such as the League of Women Voters' objections to the banner which said "Lick Bush In '88" and some other things. Can you tell us about some of the resistance that you met with in your efforts to do voter registration?

FZ: It was regional resistance. I mean one example was in Philadelphia, the Registrar of Voters for the area of the town where we were playing at the Tower Theater refused to send over voter registration slips because he said "we already have enough registered voters." He liked things the way they
were.

DS: Right, I remember that.

FZ: The other place we had troubles was Washington DC where the comment was made that "we don't know about his politics and so we're not going to send anyone over." And they withheld support. But we managed to get assistance from not the League of Women Voters there, but the Citizens' Action Group. And they sent registrars, and then in Detroit we couldn't register because of the weird laws that they have there. You'd have to have a registrar from every suburb. And all different forms and it would be just impossible to do it. In Chicago we couldn't do it because the registration had already closed. But just about everyplace else we did it. And we managed to register 11,000 people.

DS: All in all you felt it was pretty successful.

FZ: Better than none. I got other rock and rollers to do it at their shows. John Cougar Mellencamp did it. Sting did it. Earth, Wind and Fire said they were going to do it, but I don't know whether they ever did it.

DS: Do you have any plans for future voter registration drives or doing anything else? Certainly I would imagine for presidential campaign years, that there's a greater importance attached to that sort of thing.

FZ: I'll find something to do. You know, even talking about it helps.

DS: What about the show that was cancelled in Richmond and moved to Towson? They said that that was, they claimed, I read some newspaper accounts of that where they claimed that it was for logistical problems, some other band playing, or something like that.

FZ: No. Bullshit. The real thing was that was in the home territory of the PMRC and the word got out that we were going to play there and they got the school to cancel the gig. That's all it was.

DS: You think so?

FZ: Yeah. By the way did Jim Nagle tell you about the Honorary Doctoral Degree that I was supposed to receive from a Catholic university someplace back East? [29]

DS: No.

FZ: I was supposed to go there in March to receive this degree and they were going to play some of my music and they called back and cancelled. (laughter)

DS: Called back and went "woops."

FZ: Yeah. "Well we're not giving that degree this year." (laughter)

DS: OK, speaking about Towson, in that show something kind of peculiar happened havin' to do with Bob Rice giving somebody an enema. That kind of pissed you off.

FZ: Well, sure, because there was a female security guard who was hired to be part of the staff at the place and Bob Rice who was basically hired as a roadie decided to use this enema that was dangling on stage as a prop. Actually it was something that I didn't tell them to put on stage, but the alto sax player had it hanging off of his stand. Bob went up there, took this thing and he was trying to impress this girl security guard. And during the encore when the guards were lined up in front of the stage facing the audience, he sneaked down behind the barricade and jammed this nozzle up her ass. While right in the middle of this song, you know, and I think that is inexcusable and so I stopped the show and told him to apologize, and "Don't ever do it again."

DS: And then took on from there.

FZ: Sure.

DS: There are some good little musical inclusions that resulted from that too. Lyric mutations and such.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: What's a "Screaming Albanian Jizz-Weasel"?

FZ: Uh, well, that's probably (laughs) one of the things you make up right on the spot. (laughter) That was Hamburg.

DS: That was Hamburg. Tell us about the dinner in Barcelona and the raffle that came with it.

FZ: OK. Well the tour had been going on and there's all this strife in the band and the crew was edgy and all this stuff, and travel in Europe is really very rough for the crew. We had a day off in Barcelona prior to this television show that we were going to do. I decided to throw a party for the band and the crew, and I rented this restaurant and told the promoter there to arrange to get three prostitutes, and prostitutes are a very common thing in Barcelona. I said, "Get three prostitutes to come down to this dinner and we're going to have a raffle", that any members of the crew that would like to have the opportunity to get their machinery wet with one of these Barcelona hookers, that all they do is enter into the raffle. The girls came to the party, did a strip-tease and danced. They brought their own music and, this whole bunch of hoopla. It was a straightforward business deal. It was like a

"rent-a-girl" business. And Marqueson the monitor mixer was one of the raffle contestants and he won a girl. And so the deal was that after the dinner the girls were going to go back to the hotel with the lucky winners. But what happened was, Marqueson's girl took off. After the dinner, you see, everyone left and they thought they were going to meet the girls back at the hotel, and I stayed around for a while at the restaurant. About the time I was leaving, Marqueson was returning in a cab, and he was nearly in tears because his prize was gone. (laughter) This led to a situation where the promoter, who had arranged this thing, assured me that everything was going to be, you know, a very smooth operation, became totally irate that he had been fucked over by the pimp who had supplied these girls, (laughter) and saw to it personally that Marqueson got his machinery taken care of. It took him an extra couple of hours, but Marqueson got taken care of, and so, all was right with the band and crew the next day for the television show. So, during the show, we're making jokes about the raffle, and Marqueson, and that kind of stuff.

DS: Alright. They did a video of that. I hear also that there was one made in Madrid. Is that right?

FZ: Yeah.

DS: Did you access tapes of that, and will we see any of that show?

FZ: TV3 from Barcelona owes me a real master tape. They gave me a master tape after the show, but it was fucked up. It won't play, and I still have yet to receive a real copy from Barcelona. All I've got is a VHS. The thing from Madrid was just a three-quarter [inch tape].

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1. A reference to the lyrics of "Wind Up Workin' In A Gas Station".

2. This is a reference to a question that Eric facetiously asked Frank during the "questions from the audience" portion of "An Evening With Pierre Boulez and Frank Zappa" on May 23, 1989 at Schoenberg Hall, UCLA, Los Angeles.

3. May 28, 1988, Sporthalle, Linz, Austria.

4. Geraldo Rivera, jive-ass idiot television talk show host. 17

5. February 19, 1988, Orpheum Theater, Boston, at the end of "Advance Romance".

6. March 12, 1988, Memorial Auditorium, Burlington, Vermont. This happened as a result of Frank forgetting lyrics in "The Man From Utopia Meets Mary Lou" (medley).

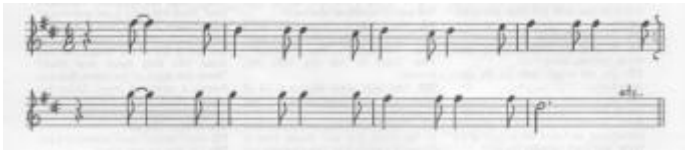
7. February 10, 1988, Warner Theater, Washington, D.C.

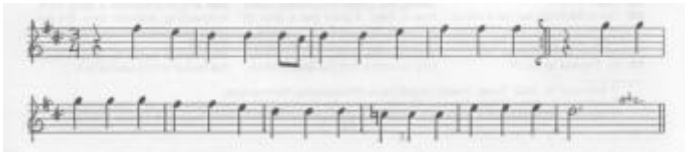
8. February 14, 1988, Tower Theater, Upper Darby (Philadelphia), Pennsylvania.

9. February 9, 1988, (actually February 10, very early in the morning) CBS News Nightwatch, with Charlie Rose.

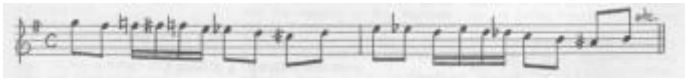
10. March 1, 1988, Fraventhal Auditorium, Muskegon, Michigan and March 4, 1988, Auditorium Theater, Chicago.

11. from the "Light Cavalry Overture" by Franz von Suppé.

12. from the "Hawaiian War Chant".

from the "Hawaiian War Chant" (as played by FZ).



13. the "Circus Lick".



14. June 10, 1989, WUTC, Chattanooga, Tennessee, Frank Zappa Special with Ken Dryden.

15. Hannah And Her Sisters.

16. April 14, 1988, Sporthalle, Köln (Cologne), W. Germany; April 16, 1988, Brighton Centre, Brighton, England; April 24, 1988, Stadthalle, Bremen, W. Germany.

17. From a skit on December 11, 1976, NBC, Saturday Night Live appearance.

18. May 24, 1988, Martin Schleyer Halle, Stuttgart, W. Germany.

19. This is a mistaken reference to the military air show disaster at Rammstein Airbase near Mannheim, not Stuttgart.

20. This incident possibly happened on the 1980 world tour. Frank did not tour Europe in 1981.

21. May 25, 1988, Mozarthalle, Mannheim, W. Germanj:

22. May 26, 1988, Stadthalle, Fürth, W. Germany.

23. May 28, 1988, Sporthalle, Linz, Austria.

24. This permutation was performed only a few times at the beginning of the 1984 world tour.

25. Representing the PTL, Sandy Galaway put forth her conviction that Hurricane Hugo, which decimated parts of the West Indies and coastal areas of South Carolina, and the San Francisco Bay area earthquake, were God's way of punishing mankind for the conviction and subsequent imprisonment of Jim Bakker.

26. Mbl, mbl, mbl, mbl is an attempt to spell that sound that one gets when combining a vocal (throat) sound with the act of brushing one finger up and down over the lips, producing the classic sound of a"dork".

27. Erroll Garner's most notable song is the classic standard "Misty".

28. The tape mentioned is from November 28, 1980 at the Uptown Theater, Chicago. This was a sort of a re-creation of the event which Frank speaks of, and during this performance, he makes reference to Bloomington, Illinois, perhaps the site of the original occurrence.

29. Duquesne University in Pittsburgh.

They're Doing the Interview of the Century – Part 2

By Den Simms, Eric Buxton, Rob Samler

Society Pages (US), #2, June 1990

On December 22, 1989, Den, Eric and Rob sat down with Frank in the comfortable confines of his basement listening room for a four-and-a-half-hour chit-chat on a wide variety of subjects. The following is part two of our interview with Professor Zappa.

Part 2 of an interview originally published by Eric Buxton, Rob Samler & Den Simms in **Society Pages USA** issues 1-3, 1990. Typed up by Bossk (R). HTML by Bossk (R). Scans by Johan Lif; image processing by Bossk (R). Some typos that I [Dave Wilcher] found have been corrected; typos in this HTML document are probably mine. Original footnotes appear as numbers encased in square brackets; I have also added some footnotes of my own, which appear as lower-case letters encased in square brackets.

FRANK ZAPPA: We've changed over the boards, so we're no longer mixing the live tapes. We finished ... in theory, we finished all that. We're now getting ready for Synclavier mixes. I just took a job scoring my first TV show for Jacques Cousteau [1], which I have to deliver before I go back to Russia on the 15th.

ERIC BUXTON: You're going back to Russia on the 15th of January?

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah, and Cousteau is going to be over there at the same time, and I'm taking a television crew with me. I'm hoping to interview him while I'm there. I'm going to get video coverage of all that weird stuff that I've seen in Moscow, and even if I never get any of it on television, it'll certainly make an interesting Honker product, because I'll show people a view of the Soviet Union they never dreamed about before.

DEN SIMMS: What sort of weird stuff have you seen?

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, usually when you see stuff about Russia on TV in the United States, it's pictures of Red Square with tanks, y'know, and all that kind of stuff. It ain't like that. There's, like, regular people doing regular stuff. There's musicians, and painters, and film directors, and all different kinds of stuff there, and they're nice people. So, I hope to do some interviews with all different kinds of guys, and just take the camera around the places I've been, some of the art galleries, and let you know what the US media has not shown you all these years.

ERIC BUXTON: Some people have imagined that everyone lives in a cell, y'know, and that they're afraid to go outside.

FRANK ZAPPA: It's not true.

ERIC BUXTON: It's just ... on the surface, it's just like here, right?

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, it would be like here if you could go out and get something to eat whenever you wanted to. There are certain difficulties there, but during the four times that I've been there before, Stass [?] [a1], the guy who's been my host over there, has shown

me as many different kinds of Soviet life, at different levels, as anything I wanted to see. He would take me to see it. So, I've seen the apartment of the famous artist there, and it might as well [have been], like, a Manhattan loft, totally decked out, and the guy drives a Rolls-Royce, and the whole business. That's a unique case. And then, I've been to a building that has a group of communal flats like typical communist communal flats, where different people, or families, live in parts of the room, and there's a list on the wall that says which day of the week which resident has to clean the entire building, which day of the week that person cooks for everybody else, and all this stuff, and ...

DEN SIMMS: Communism at work.

"All the people in the film business in Moscow have a restaurant where they all hang out, and they get drunk, and they sing. I mean, it's really weird!"

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah, well, y'know, it's grim, totally grim, and they guy I went to visit there is one of the most famous of the film directors in the Soviet Union, and he lives in this little box in this building, and the room that he lives in is just slightly larger than this. [Frank gestures at the room in which the interview is being conducted, about 20 ft. x 20 ft.] It's got a bed. It's got a table with a word processor, where he writes his scripts, an acoustic guitar, about fifty books, a bunch of paintings and some vodka bottles, and that's about it. I mean, I've seen all different kinds of things. And then, I've been taken to the ... all the people in the film business in Moscow, they have a restaurant where they all hang out, which is, like, an official government restaurant for people in the Russian movie business, directors, writers, actors, and so forth, and the food is fair, almost edible. But the people go in there, and they get drunk, and they sing. Whole tables of people just sitting there, singing their hearts out. I mean, it's really weird! [laughter] If you could imagine everybody in Hollywood eating at the same restaurant and just singing [laughter], you could never imagine this, but that's the way it is in Moscow.

ROB SAMLER: What ever happened with the woman you told us about, who has the, uh ... the all-finishing ...

FRANK ZAPPA: The liquid. [2]

ROB SAMLER: Yeah.

FRANK ZAPPA: She's still there, and I haven't been able to make a deal for her product on the West yet. I told her that, "So far, no customers."

ROB SAMLER: It's still a mystery, though, how it works ...

FRANK ZAPPA: I have the patent, in Russian, sitting in my briefcase right there, if you want to see it, but other than that, I have no idea how it works, or what it is.

DEN SIMMS: So, I get the impression that the Russian authorities have been pretty cooperative, as far as letting you see things, and just in general.

FRANK ZAPPA: I never had to ask permission for anything over there. I mean, the permission you get is your visa to go there, and to go there, somebody has to invite you, but once that's done ... I was never followed around.

DEN SIMMS: I can remember reading about somebody who was talking about being a tourist in Russia. [3] He was saying that you have to have their special Intourist [4] guide to take you everywhere, and so, I assume that situation like that has changed or lessened.

FRANK ZAPPA: No, you no longer need that. If you're part of a packaged tour, you would go through Intourist, but if you're a business traveler, the person who is responsible for you on the ground is the person who invites you, see, and if you reciprocate, and you want to

have your Russian friend come over to the United States, they can't come unless you invite them. It's just rigmarole. Then, you're responsible for them while they're here.

DEN SIMMS: In the last few months, relations have definitely been improving with the Soviet Union. Has that made things easier for you?

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, I haven't been there since May or June. See, the first time I went was last February, so I went February, March, April, May. That's what it was. Once a month in the first part of ['89]. So, I'm going back again in January.

DEN SIMMS: I see. Then let me ask the question this way. Do you think that when you go back, that the improved relations between our two governments is gonna have any effect on what you do there?

FRANK ZAPPA: I don't know, because unless you're there to see what's going on, you can't really judge what's happening in the Soviet Union by what you see on US television. That's one of the reasons why I wanted to go in the first place, because it helped me refine my data filter. [5] Now, when I look at news footage about anything happening in the East Bloc, I can really sniff out the bullshit that they're feeding to you, because I've been there, and I've seen it, and I know how they try to lie to you in the US media about stuff. So, to say that relations have improved, well, maybe they have, maybe they haven't. I don't really know that unless I go there and see it.

DEN SIMMS: That's certainly the impression you get from CNN, and everything else, television, newspapers, and such like that. It sounds more optimistic than it did, say, midway through the Reagan era.

FRANK ZAPPA: Oh, that's for sure, but they don't have any choice, because it's just too obvious that things are changing ever [a]there. But you still get the whiff, especially on CNN, that they wish the cold war was still going on, and CNN broadcasts a lot of stuff that says Gorbachev is not going to last, and we shouldn't trust him, and you hear that stuff all the time. All the time, and I'm not convinced that that's correct.

DEN SIMMS: I kind of wonder about that myself. I have a friend who, although I love him a lot, his politics are completely in opposition to mine. He's a very staunch arch-conservative, and that's what I keep hearing from him. He says, "Gorbachev will never last. The guy'll never last. They're gonna have him out of there." I just wonder ...

"The whole way in which we conduct ourselves on an international level is very old-fashioned. It's arrogant, and we're gonna be left in the dust, because we need to rethink the whole way in which we relate to the other nations of the world."

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, just look at the facts. Even if he's out of there, he has had his impact. If they take him away, that ain't gonna change what's happening in the rest of the Warsaw Pact.

DEN SIMMS: Yeah, certainly. Even given what's happened just today with Romania ...

FRANK ZAPPA: I saw that the first second it came in on CNN! I jumped up out of bed, and I said, "Yea! Only Albania and Yugoslavia to go!" [laughter] Yugoslavia is halfway there. Albania is going to be a tough one to crack.

DEN SIMMS: What about Bulgaria?

FRANK ZAPPA: They've already had their reshuffle. It's still not as widespread as what has happened in Czechoslovakia. People thought that Czechoslovakia was going to be a tough one to crack, and they gave Romania no hope in some New York Times estimate, so I'm overjoyed with this. But now, the real Communist stinker governments that remain ... the big worry is China.

DEN SIMMS: That was going to be my next question.

FRANK ZAPPA: You still got stinkers in China. You got 'em in Cuba. And North Korea. These are real hard-line regimes, and it's going to take a lot to make changes occur there. But you can see that there's hope for China, because I don't believe that the average Chinese wants to live under that authoritarian system.

DEN SIMMS: What do you think about the recent developments with the trips to Russia that [National Security Advisor Brent] Scoecroft made?

FRANK ZAPPA: Scoecroft going to Russia, or China?

DEN SIMMS: China. Pardon me, China.

FRANK ZAPPA: I think it was a mistake.

DEN SIMMS: I have sort of mixed feelings about it. I mean, it behooves the situation to at least have some sort of ... we can't have any effect on them, in terms of helping democracy come along, if we don't have any sort of relationships with them, but at the same time, there is something to be said, in a moral vein, about doing business with people who are using their tanks and guns to suppress what happened in Tiananmen Square.

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, let's just say that our foreign policy is not consistent, and it's not well thought out. I think that it's riddled with right-wing ideology, and when you have ideology as a block to logic, you can't really be effective. You have to look at all aspects of it. There's different ways to analyze every situation, and I don't think that the people who are in the business of analyzing, or the ones who have access to power with that analysis, have necessarily provided informed advisories to the guys who make the decisions. I just think that the whole way in which we conduct ourselves on an international level is very old-fashioned. It's arrogant, and we're gonna be left in the dust, because we need to rethink the whole way in which we relate to the other nations of the world.

DEN SIMMS: In what way? In not being so much the "speaking softly while carrying a big stick" kind of a country?

FRANK ZAPPA: We don't have a fuckin' big stick! [laughter] Nuclear weapons are not a big stick! You can't afford to use that stick, OK!?

DEN SIMMS: That's true. The use of nuclear weapons constitutes suicide.

FRANK ZAPPA: That's right. That's not a stick. So, we have no stick. We've got an army we just sent into Panama! We stand a good chance of having our butts whipped in Panama! [laughter] Where's your stick!? You know, it's like being a joke. We shouldn't be the world's policemen. Nobody asked us to be the world's policemen. If you want to lead in this regard, look at the way those students behaved in China. They have a respect for the myth of democracy in the United States. If they actually knew how little people cared for democracy in this country, they probably never woulda stood in front of the tank. But the legend of, y'know, "America, the home of the free and the brave" ...

DEN SIMMS: That's the hope that they have.

FRANK ZAPPA: That's right. The thing that you have, to lead people in other nations with your point of view, is the moral certitude with which you conduct your business on that high level, not whether or not you're going to send in troops.

DEN SIMMS: I mentioned Bulgaria a little while ago. I understand you attended the concert of the Bulgarian ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Bulgarian Women's Chorus. Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: What did you think of that?

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, I loved the music, but I went backstage after the concert, and it was very, very depressing, because it looked to me like the three male members of the entourage that were playing the musical instruments, the way they were dressed and the way they behaved backstage, it looked to me like they were secret police, and the behavior of the women, the way they were lined up in these little rows backstage to shake hands with people, it just seemed to me so controlled, and it was that ugly aspect of communism that was dangling over the backstage aura of the thing that really turned me off, but I still like the music.

DEN SIMMS: The music, that was good?

FRANK ZAPPA: Fabulous.

DEN SIMMS: Yeah. Unfortunately the tickets had been sold out locally, where I live, and I didn't get a chance to see it, but I just recently ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, you know what it was like ... you heard the CD? [6]

DEN SIMMS: I have just recently been turned on to recordings of them, and I was blown away. That's pretty unique stuff.

members of the Bulgarian Women's Chorus

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, can you imagine walking into a room, and sitting down, and the lights go down, and here come twenty or thirty of these women, dressed in native costume? No "one, two, three, four", no big count-off or anything. No conductor in the first part. They just lined up and what came out was an exact replica of that CD. In tune!

DEN SIMMS: That's great. Yeah.

FRANK ZAPPA: Boom! Singing! I couldn't believe it. There were a couple of minor fuck-ups later on in the show, and then, they had a woman who was conducting the chorus on the second half, where they were doing it not in native costume but in concert dress, but it was astonishing, because anybody who has ever tried to carry a tune, and stay in tune, with no musical accompaniment, has to respect that many people, who sang that kind of harmony, totally on the beat. Just fabulous. It was amazing.

DEN SIMMS: In my school days, I participated in a capella choir stuff, and it takes a lot of work.

FRANK ZAPPA: This was Olympic grade performance, no question, and I understand that in order to join the chorus, every three or four years, they have contests where thousands of women from all over the country come and compete for a job in this radio chorus.

DEN SIMMS: Well, I hope they keep sending them around the world, because there was a lot of respect given to them by the Western world. I read quite a number of newspaper articles ...

FRANK ZAPPA: But you see, they performed in Europe many times before they came here. It's also part of our foreign policy to exclude certain types of performers from certain countries. I mean, the US government has made it difficult for, let's say, "punk" or "protest" groups, from even England or Ireland, to come to the United States because there are certain things that we are censoring out from other people's cultures ... Eric, you're doin'

good. From this point of view, this is very well-balanced. The only thing that is disturbing is that rag at the top of the twig there. [7]

ERIC BUXTON: Oh, I thought that was a yellow ribbon, like, for the hostages of something. [laughter]

FRANK ZAPPA: No, I think that was a little marker that the salesman at the Christmas tree lot hung on it to say it was sold. Well, maybe ... yeah, let's leave it on there for the hostages. [laughter] For the new hostages in Panama. For that CBS producer that we still don't know what happened to. Good thinking, Eric. Just keep me honest, here. [laughter]

DEN SIMMS: OK, back to some musical questions. As **Stage, Volume 2**, you released that whole unit of Helsinki. Is there any possibility that you would consider doing that with one of the shows from 1988?

FRANK ZAPPA: Um ... no.

DEN SIMMS: You don't think so?

FRANK ZAPPA: No, but what I'm gonna do is put out an album called **The Best Band You Never Heard in Your Life**, which will be all stuff from '88, but from all different cities. The reason for it is that there was no one show that was one hundred percent fabulous, and I think that if you're going to listen to an album like that, especially of that kind of a band, the best way to represent that band is to take all of its primo performances and glue 'em together.

DEN SIMMS: In "Marqueson's Chicken", there is a vamp [8] in, I believe, 21 [rhythm]. Is that ...

FRANK ZAPPA: [Frank hums the vamp]

DEN SIMMS: Yeah, and in "Trouble Comin' ...", you used one in thirteen [rhythm] [9].

"Warner Brothers had made it impossible for me to get a record contract with anybody, and I couldn't go into a recording studio, in an act of desperation, I took my four-track and hooked up a bunch of dipshit equipment here in this basement, just like every other garage-band guy would do."

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: Both of those vamps had been utilized previously in, I believe, 1978.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah, and also in "Keep It Greasey", the **Joe's Garage** version.

DEN SIMMS: Hmm ... I hadn't realized that.

FRANK ZAPPA: Listen to "Keep It Greasy" on **Joe's Garage**, and see if you don't hear that.

DEN SIMMS: OK, good. Do they have any titles, or what are the origins of those things?

FRANK ZAPPA: Where did they come from?

DEN SIMMS: Yeah.

FRANK ZAPPA: A long time ago when I was involved with this lawsuit with Warner Brothers, they had made it impossible for me to get a record contract with anybody. There was a period of time when I was kind of locked out of the music business, and since I didn't have a recording studio at the time, and since I didn't have a contract, and I couldn't go into a recording studio, in an act of desperation, I took my four-track and hooked up a bunch of dipshit equipment here in this basement, just like every other garage-band guy would do, and I was making some one-man tapes here. That's where those things came from, from that period when I was doing little rhythm-box tapes in the basement.

DEN SIMMS: Is there any relationship between "Thirteen" and "Tink Walks Amok"? Are there parts of that that were utilized in that, too?

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: Yeah. OK. What happened with the Albert Wing ... I have it written here as the "Wing/Pollack marriage" ... that happened?

FRANK ZAPPA: I haven't seen Albert since the tour, so I can't tell ya.

DEN SIMMS: Was that a marriage that took place, or what?

FRANK ZAPPA: I think that is was ... I was shown a bogus marriage certificate. [10]

DEN SIMMS: Right. That's what I'd seen that prompted the question.

FRANK ZAPPA: Right. That's all it was.

ERIC BUXTON: I was present at the ceremony. I was in the hotel room.

DEN SIMMS: Where you there? What happened?

FRANK ZAPPA: You should be interviewing Eric. [laughter] He's the eyewitness to most of the stuff that went on.

ERIC BUXTON: They just ... in a drunken stupor, they were stickin' together for the whole tour, and they wanted to get married, and Bruce is supposedly an ordained minister ... that's right. I forget which town it was but there was a whole bunch of girls from New Jersey, who were having, like, a bachelorette party, and we were just hanging around the hotel, gettin' ready to go to sleep, nothin' to do. Bobby Martin said "I just found this whole room full of girls who want to hang out and drink and party." We went to the room, and we had a rippin' party all night long, and it climaxed with this marriage ceremony [laughter], and Bruce Fowler, he performed the ceremony, and he ate the pages of the Bible that he was reading from.

Bruce eats the Bible, artist's conception (Phin Urban)

Warren Cuccurullo in 1977

ALL: [much laughter]

FRANK ZAPPA: Just to seal the deal.

ERIC BUXTON: He ripped them right out and started chewing on them, and that was the marriage ceremony. [laughter]

FRANK ZAPPA: They didn't tell me that part. I'm sure that woulda wound up on stage. They always leave out the good stuff.

DEN SIMMS: OK. Who is Rondo Hatton? You've introduced yourself as Rondo.

FRANK ZAPPA: Rondo Hatton was a character actor from the old movies who had a disease called acromegaly.

DEN SIMMS: I never heard of that one.

ROB SAMLER: It's like elephantitis.

FRANK ZAPPA: That's right. He had a real big and grotesque head, and he was a character actor in some horror movies in the old days.

DEN SIMMS: Um-hm ... so why would you introduce yourself as him?

FRANK ZAPPA: Why not? [laughter]

ERIC BUXTON: Was he "The Creeper"?

FRANK ZAPPA: I don't know what the movie was. He was one of these ... at one period in American film history, he was the classic ugly guy. Somebody had to carry on the tradition. [b]

DEN SIMMS: You've got, needless to say, a whole bunch of exotic items lurking in your vault, such as, oh, there's something like a conversation of, or definitely, there's a video tape of Al Malkin demonstrating the blow job on a banana. [11] I've heard an interview where you're telling someone about a tape that was made, where, uh ... who was it ... Warren and someone else are fighting over the girl that each one of them is trying to fuck.

ROB SAMLER: Meatball?

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah. That's Al Malkin.

DEN SIMMS: Things like that. What other kinds of exotities are lurking down there?

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, I've got a videotape that was made in the promoter's room in Pistoia, Italy, when he had refused to pay some parts of the crew, and he was in danger of not paying the band for going on, and the manager that I had at the time, Bennett Glotzer, had just punched this guy out. [laughter] He was about a foot and a half taller than him, and he just hit him in the face about fifteen times. I heard about this, and I told Nordegg, Thomas Nordegg, who was operating the video camera, "Thomas, go and take pictures of this." And so, he dutifully went in there, and nobody believed that the camera was rolling. He got coverage of this meeting with these guys, I mean, they have this table full of lira, and there's all these mafia-looking guys, and they're shoveling this stuff around, and this promoter is explaining in these very lame terms why he hadn't paid, and [laughter] Bennett, y'know, like, screaming at him, and Thomas just walking around there very calmly video-taping the whole thing. I got that. Then a few years later, this promotor, Francesco Sanavio [?] [c], came to Los Angeles, and he had the nerve to call up and say "Can I come over?", and I said "Sure. Come on over", and I made him watch the tape, and he said "I didn't believe that there was any tape in the camera." Here he is looking at himself doing all this stuff. He's in jail now. [laughter] In Italy.

ERIC BUXTON: Never believe there's no film in the camera. Never.

Thomas Nordegg

FRANK ZAPPA: That's right. Not with Nordegg, that's for sure. [laughter]

DEN SIMMS: I'm kind of surprised that you didn't have somebody doing a "Thomas Nordegg" in '88.

FRANK ZAPPA: Because there's only one Thomas Nordegg, and he was working for Warren Cuccurullo.

DEN SIMMS: Or just someone lurking around with a video camera during that tour.

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, see, I couldn't afford to do that. Thomas did it because he just wanted to do it, and he was getting regular salary to be the keyboard roadie on that tour in

'82, '81 and '82, and he just decided to get into the video. And he wasn't getting paid any extra money for doing it ...

DEN SIMMS: Voluner for t on his part.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah, something he loved to do, and if he hadn't been that deranged about doing it, those tapes wouldn't exist.

DEN SIMMS: More power to Thomas. Some good stuff came out of that.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah, he's a fabulous guy.

DEN SIMMS: We've heard this thing called "Lost in a Whirlpool" or "Lost in This Whirlpool" ... [d]

FRANK ZAPPA: "Lost in a Whirlpool".

DEN SIMMS: "Lost in a Whirlpool". OK. What are the origins of that? Was it a demo tape or something?

FRANK ZAPPA: No, it was the very first ... it's the earliest tape that I have a copy of, from when I first started taping stuff.

DEN SIMMS: From the Cucamonga period?

FRANK ZAPPA: No, that was 1957! [e]

DEN SIMMS: Really? That's the date on that?

FRANK ZAPPA: That's right, and "Lost in a Whirlpool" was taped on one of those tape recorders that you have in a school in the audio/visual department. We went into this room, this empty room at the junior college in Lancaster, after school, and got this tape recorded, and just turned it on. The guitars are me and my brother and the vocal is Don Vliet.

ERIC BUXTON: Reel-to-reel?

FRANK ZAPPA: Reel-to-reel. 1957.

ERIC BUXTON: And you composed the, uh ... you wrote the words?

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, the story of "Lost in a Whirlpool" goes back even farther. When I was in high school in San Diego in '55, there was a guy who grew up to be a sports writer named Larry Littlefield. He, and another guy named Jeff Harris, and I used to hang out, and we used to make up stories, little skits and stuff, you know, dumb little teenage things. One of the plots that we cooked up was about a person who was skindiving – San Diego's a surfer kind of an area – skindiving in the San Diego sewer system [laughter], and talking about encountering brown, blind fish. [laughter] It was kind of like the Cousteau expedition of its era. [laughter] So, when I moved to Lancaster from San Diego, I had discussed this scenario with Vliet, and that's where the lyrics come from. It's like a musical manifestation of this other skindiving scenario.

LOST IN A WHIRLPOOL

Well, I'm lost in a whirlpool,
Yeah, baby, my head is goin' round,
Well, ever since my baby flushed me,
Oh, been goin' round,
Yeah, 'round 'n' around,
Well, I'm lost in this whirlpool -
I keep goin' down and down ...

There's a big brown fish
Lookin' at me!
He ain't got no eyes!
How could that motherfucker possibly see?
Ooh, baby, baby,
I'm gonna be afraid he gonna touch me!
Well, I'm lost in this whirlpool
Oh, I can't even see!

Baby,
Won't you come help me?
Pour some Drano down
And get the plunger right after me!
I'll let you know a little secret, baby:
I'm gettin' tired of all this pee ...

(Plunk those stringers, Mother Goose!)
Oh, my head's in the noose!

Mee, wee-wop! [f]

DEN SIMMS: What about another thing we've heard similar to that called "Fallin' in Love Is a Stupid Habit"?

FRANK ZAPPA: What is that?

DEN SIMMS: Yeah.

FRANK ZAPPA: What is it? I don't know what you're talking about.

DEN SIMMS: Oh, it's a ... from what I understand, it was a demo tape that you made for Jimmy Carl Black, that has ... what I've heard is apparently you playing, y'know, sitting and chording at the piano, and sort of humming some words. You're not familiar with this?

FRANK ZAPPA: That's not me. Never.

DEN SIMMS: I'll be darned.

FRANK ZAPPA: First of all, I don't play the piano, so it ain't me. [12]

DEN SIMMS: I'll be darned. Are there any compositions from the **Grand Wazoo**-**Waka/Jawaka** period that we haven't heard, that either weren't released on the albums, or perhaps, weren't played live, or anything from that era, that's still lurking out there unlistened to by your fans?

FRANK ZAPPA: Actually, when the Grand Wazoo did its tour, I think five cities, there was some reel-to-reel tape made of that, and there's some live recordings of that band, but they'll never come out. The quality of that tape is not that good.

DEN SIMMS: They won't be released because the quality is sub-par?

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah, it's just, like, they're more like souvenirs than real recordings.

DEN SIMMS: Do you plan on doing any more lecturing?

FRANK ZAPPA: I got a letter inviting me to Chicago for three days, to Chicago University, sometime next year. I don't know, I may do that. I occasionally get invitations to be a speaker at graduations, and things like that, but ...

DEN SIMMS: You've said that you consider any type of organization of material could be construed ...

FRANK ZAPPA: As a composition.

DEN SIMMS: ... as a composition. Is there anything that you could construe as composition, as something that could be thought of on those terms, that you could to that would be like lecturing, or like something else, that would be public performance, or in public view, that you could do that wouldn't lose you four hundred grand when you go out on the road and do it?

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, the thing about lecturing is there's no overhead. It's, like, probably eighty percent profit, what you get for going out, but at the same time, I've got a rate that I charge for going out and speaking, and it's a minimum of fifteen thousand dollars, so there's only certain places that have the ability to pay that kind of rate, because in order for me to go there, I have to stop working here. It takes two days out of my life to go and come back and to do this kind of stuff. That's what it costs to get me to show up some place and talk.

DEN SIMMS: That's the parameters of that. What about doing something, um ... lecturing with the Synclavier, or something like that?

FRANK ZAPPA: The minute you involve production, the minute you have an audio manifestation, you're talking about overhead. You have a crew. You have the PA system. You have trucking for the PA system. You have the soundcheck in the afternoon to make sure it all works, and now, the whole idea of going in and just talking to somebody ... well, you know, I tried it once before with digital tape ...

DEN SIMMS: Yeah, you did something in Santa Monica [13], and one up in San Francisco. [14]

FRANK ZAPPA: I also did one at the college in Northridge. [15] The unusual result there was that people didn't wanna listen to the music. They just wanted to talk. They wanted to ask me questions, so basically, I had to shut the music off and sit there [laughter] and answer questions. I think that there's a different kind of audience that comes to see me if I'm just talking, and I'm always happy to answer the questions, because that's usually the funniest part of the thing. I don't really like giving a speech, y'know. I'm happy to answer questions, but it seems a little bit presumptuous to climb up on a ...

DEN SIMMS: What about the speech you did for ASUC? [16] Did you have fun doin' that? That was a great speech, by the way!

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, that was a different situation. They begged for that. They asked for it, and so, I wrote the thing out, and really ...

DEN SIMMS: It was pretty spiffy.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah, piled that one on 'em.

DEN SIMMS: That's something that one of these days I want to return to my college, to College of Marin, where I met Scott, and play the tape that I have of that some of my instructors.

"They didn't know what I was going to say, and they did not enjoy it. Actually, there was quite a bit of backlash at the subsequent banquet, where I was forced to sit at a table with some composers that had attended. The drunker they got, they started attacking me at the table. It was really quite laughable, people with their mouths full of peas getting vehement over this stuff, and it was pathetic."

There's some of 'em who wouldn't wanna hear it, but there's a couple who would really laugh along with me on that.

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, the result in Ohio was that most of the people didn't want to hear it either. In fact, the way it was done, I was at this little podium, and then, on the stage with me, seated in chairs, was the music faculty, y'know ...

DEN SIMMS: [laughs] Oh, God!

FRANK ZAPPA: ... sitting like a bunch of puppets onstage, and they didn't know what I was going to say [laughter], and they did not enjoy it. Actually, there was quite a bit of backlash at the subsequent banquet, where I was forced to sit at a table with some composers that had attended. The drunker they got, they started attacking me at the table. It was really quite laughable.

DEN SIMMS: Really?

FRANK ZAPPA: Y'know, people with their mouths full of peas [much laughter] getting vehement over this stuff, and it was pathetic. [laughter]

DEN SIMMS: They musta been squirmin' while they were sittin' onstage.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah. They were squirmin', but I don't believe that what I said was really all that much ...

DEN SIMMS: It wasn't damaging. Like I said, there's some of the instructors that I had, that could listen to that and take it as tongue-in-cheek, and not worry too much about being spoofed in that regard, 'cause basically, it's true.

FRANK ZAPPA: People take themselves too seriously. C'mon! have a laugh for a minute! If you choose to be a composer in the United States, you have to know before you start doing that, that you're not buying into a life of glory. You're really entering into society at lower than the bottom rung of society, because, y'know, drug dealers have more respect in the society than composers, 'cause at least they perform a useful function for somebody [laughter], but who needs a fuckin' composer?

DEN SIMMS: Right. We've heard talk of some possible things that you were thinking about releasing. One was **Phase Three** [g]. What's the status of that?

FRANK ZAPPA: I did some more work on it two weeks ago. As a matter of fact, this German documentary [17] basically concerns itself with the putting together of **Phase Three**.

DEN SIMMS: I see. Yeah. I guess, actually, we've heard you talk about that on numerous occasions, and what you always seem to say is "Well, there's new Synclavier stuff that I want to ..."

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, that's a fact. It's not done, and I'll tell ya that the material that's in it, it's so unique, and I think the concept is ... it's a real special album, and I don't wanna release it until I've optimized it. I coulda put it out a year ago, but I would've regretted it, just because of what's come along with the software on the Syncalvier.

DEN SIMMS: That gives us good reason to be patient.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah. I mean, it's not like I'm lazy.

DEN SIMMS: What else is gonna come out, as far as live recordings, from 1988? Like, a "Broadway ... – Part Two", or ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, no ...

DEN SIMMS: **The Best Band You Never Heard ...**?

FRANK ZAPPA: The major thing from '88 is gonna be the album **The Best Band You Never Heard ...**, and the stuff that doesn't go in that, some of the oddities, like the "Make a Sex Noise", from, um, Binghamton, and maybe even the medley that we did with "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling", coupled with "The Godfather" [18], that's more stuff for **You Can't Do That on Stage ...**. I think "Stairway to Star Wars", I mean "Star Wars Won't Work" [19] is also for **You Can't Do That on Stage**. [h]

Frank explains the rules to "Make a Sex Noise"

DEN SIMMS: How 'about the **Mystery CD**? [20] You were thinkin' about making a CD of those two **Mystery Discs** ...

FRANK ZAPPA: The **Mystery Discs**? I got a little problem for next year, which is our twenty-fifth anniversary year, and the major goal is to have the entire catalog out [on compact disc]. That's releasing a lot of material. It seems like the **Mystery Disc** would be something that would fit into that, but it would be a lower order of priority than the rest of the stuff. [i]

DEN SIMMS: How 'bout **The Lost Episodes**?

FRANK ZAPPA: That, I think, will come out next year. [j] I think that that's something that people should get a hold of.

DEN SIMMS: That you feel pretty determined to wanna complete and get out there?

FRANK ZAPPA: It's done.

DEN SIMMS: Keneally told me about somethin' that you were thinkin' about called **Cover**, where you had even envisioned a manhole cover, supposedly, as the album cover, and then, having it all cover tunes.

FRANK ZAPPA: Occasionally I think about doin' things like that, but it seems like too much work for too little result. I mean, it's somethin' that I would laugh at, maybe ten percent of the fans would laugh at. I think most of the fans would be more interested in hearing new material.

DEN SIMMS: Your fans really liked ... I think I can vouch for the fans in saying that people did like **Broadway the Hard Way** a lot ...

Short Interruption

DEN SIMMS: We really wanna thank you for doin' this interview.

FRANK ZAPPA: Hey, it's the least I can do, y'know. If I've got a fan, I owe them this!

DEN SIMMS: Well, there's a lot of other people who don't look at their fans quite that way, y'know.

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, they're wrong.

ERIC BUXTON: Did Jim [Nagle, Frank's publicist] tell ya what we're gonna do with this, y'know, the the magazine that we're putting out, and everything?

FRANK ZAPPA: No. Hm-mm.

ERIC BUXTON: Well, basically it's a fanzine that's been ... we meant to give you some back issues to look at. It's been put out already for the last ten years ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Oh, I have some of the back issues of ...

ERIC BUXTON: It's **Society Pages**.

FRANK ZAPPA: ... yeah, of the Norwegian version.

ERIC BUXTON: And they're just ... they just can't do it anymore, y'know, for various reasons, and they offered us the opportunity to take it over, and we decided to do it. We're gonna maintain a lot of integrity, both technically, and, uh ... spiritually, or whatever. We're gonna eliminate all the bootleg ads or endorsements. No references to any any bootleg vinyl ...

DEN SIMMS: This is somethin' I was gonna say. You've probably seen some of these things, other fanzines, **Zappalog** [k] and things like that ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

"I don't mind the grapevine. What I mind is guys who rip me off and make a profit from it. It depends on what the intent is. If the intent is to rip me off, then I hate it. If the intent is to find out what's going on, then I think it's fabulous. "

DEN SIMMS: The one thing that we are all in absolute agreement about, that we want to do differently than what other people have done, between the three of us, we don't like bootleg records. We don't like the idea of what a bootlegging is all about. At the same time, there is a little bit of a ... uh ... I was trying to find a way to describe it ... we have definitely helped out education, as far as understanding your music, by the way of getting cheezy tapes that are done in concerts, and the other things, that are kinda collected and passed around like baseball cards in a little grapevine that exists among your fans.

FRANK ZAPPA: I don't mind the grapevine. What I mind is guys who actually take the stuff, and try to rip me off, and make a profit from it. They're also ripping off the fans, because they're getting sub-standard versions. This is gonna be great!

ERIC BUXTON: We don't deal with people like that. A lot of people, they'll press a vinyl bootleg album ... I go into record stores, and there's stacks of boot "alternatives", they call 'em. That's bullshit, and also, a lot of people who trade tapes will do it where ... you send 'em two or three tapes, and they'll send you back one filled up with material ...

DEN SIMMS: It's what's commonly known as the two-for-one deal. You send 'em two blank tapes, they'll send ya back one with music on it, and essentially, I look at that as being ... it translates into money. It's the same deal.

ERIC BUXTON: Not only is it immoral, it's illegal. That's the unauthorized recording of sound.

FRANK ZAPPA: That's right. No question. It's a violation of two copyrights. It's a violation of the (C) copyright of the compositions. It's a violation of the (P) copyright of the master tape, which I own, of the performance.

DEN SIMMS: And at the same time, certainly from my point of view, I have to admit that I, perhaps, feel a little bit less than pure as the driven snow, because, perhaps having some cassette tapes that were recorded in concert, trading them around, might be, certainly from a lawyer's point of view, breaking some of those copyright regulations, and such, too.

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, look, it depends on what the intent is. If the intent is to rip me off, then I hate it. If the intent is to find out what's going on, then I think it's fabulous. I'm glad that somebody takes an interest in it, and I'm glad they enjoy it, and whatever I do is for

other people's enjoyment here, y'know? But just like anybody else, who wants to get ripped off? I'm not interested in bending over. So ... there you have it.

DEN SIMMS: That's great to have you articulate it that way. It's somethin' that I have sort of thought that you probably felt that way, but never heard it articulated that way, so, that's nice that you put it in words.

ERIC BUXTON: The three of us, we're the ones runnin' this, and we're operating strictly on a not-for-profit basis. Any money we take in, we're either gonna hold it, and use it to improve the quality of the magazine, or if we have any money left over, we might have a party, where everybody can get together. We're not taking any money for our own selves out of it.

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, even if you could make a profit on it, I wouldn't mind that you did, 'cause you're doing work, you know.

ERIC BUXTON: It's a labor of love. [laughter]

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah, but if you're doing work, and you make a profit, I'm not gonna say "Hey! Eric!", y'know. Make a profit. Capitalism could be a very good thing for you.

DEN SIMMS: OK. Here's somethin' I've asked you about twice, and both times gotten kind of an answer that just sort of fluffed things over, so I wanna try to sort of pin you down on this. I would really like to get a hold of scores of your music, but in the way you currently put out music, it's really expensive, and a guy like me simply just can't afford it.

FRANK ZAPPA: There's no other way.

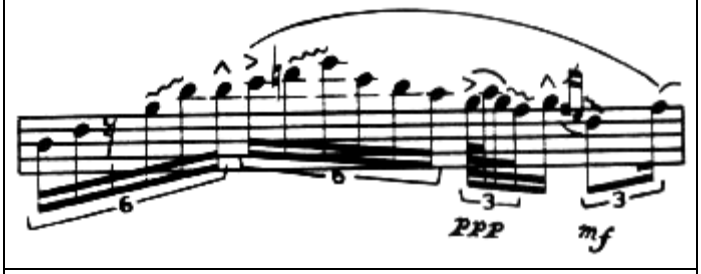
DEN SIMMS: Well, there's these things called "pocket scores". Needless to say, you know what those are.

FRANK ZAPPA: Sure.

DEN SIMMS: They're small. I just wondered that given the fact that you've got the Synclavier, and with computer printing, if there is a way that those scores could be cheaply reproduced and printed off, and put in some little form, like, a pocket score that we could send away for to Barfko-Swill, for ten or twenty bucks, or somethin' that we could afford, and be able to look at scores to those pieces.

FRANK ZAPPA: I wish. There's no cheap way to do it, because in order to prepare the pocket score, you have to go to printing plates, and do all the rest of that stuff, OK? The total amount that it would cost me to prepare, in that medium, is in excess of what I could make from selling pocket scores, so if you wanna have a score right now, the only way to do it is to have it reproduced from the actual onionskins. It's a full-sized score. I don't do it. I have to send it out to a place called Judy Greene music, and they duplicate those things, and it's very expensive. A full-sized score is about two hundred fifty dollars.

DEN SIMMS: All right. So, I suppose the limitations on that is that you need to have enough people who are willing to spend the money to pay for the overhead of having that done, and the overhead is a little expensive.

FRANK ZAPPA: Correct. Yeah. It's not something that you can solve with the Synclavier, because in order for the information to be in the Synclavier, someone has to type it in.

measure 8 of "Pink Napkins"

DEN SIMMS: Someone has to type all that stuff in there. Yeah.

FRANK ZAPPA: That's right, and they get paid lots of dollars per hour for doing this work. So, there's no easy way to do it.

DEN SIMMS: Yeah ... OK. Well, that satisfies me on that.

FRANK ZAPPA: Does that pin that answer down for ya in the most, uh ...

DEN SIMMS: It doesn't make me feel any better, but it relieves my anxiety of thinking that the question hasn't been posed to you in a way that you really understand what it was that I'm after.

FRANK ZAPPA: It just means that in the past, when the question was asked, I was not doing very well in answering it, but I think that ... if you want to see what the scores look like while you're here, I'll march into the other room, and you can look at 'em.

DEN SIMMS: Well, the kind of thing that I like to do [is something that] ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Is follow the music?

DEN SIMMS: ... I've shown a few people who don't have musical training in their background. This is something that Scott and I used to do in school a lot. He was somebody who I used to have a lot of fun doing this with, which is listening to music and reading along with the score on it. That's just a wonderful thing.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: One of the things I like to do, I like to listen to "Pink Napkins", and watch that music ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Go by ...

DEN SIMMS: ... in that guitar book [1]. It's beautiful, y'know, and it's not so much thinking [in technical terms] ... y'know, a layman can do this. Somebody who can tap their foot 4/4, and knows that four of those taps come in every one of those measures, can sit there and look at this page, and watch it flow and rise, and if it's scored for an orchestra, watch when the music gets loud, all of a sudden, lots of notes appear on the page, and all that. You don't have to be trained to be able to learn how to do that ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: ... and I've always found it to be a really wonderful experience to have that visual counterpart for the music.

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, I wish I could provide it, but y'know, first of all, the sales of the orchestral albums is very small, meaning there is a very small portion of the audience that's even interested in that kind of stuff. Secondly, the cost of preparing those scores, out of all the people who've bought the orchestral albums, I'm sure that an even smaller percentage of them would want to have a score.

DEN SIMMS: Obviously. Yeah. Not as popular as Beethoven.

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, that's for sure. But given choice between spending ten or twenty bucks for a score, or ten or twenty dollars for an album of something, most people would spend it for something to listen to, rather than something to read ...

DEN SIMMS: Sure. Of course.

FRANK ZAPPA: ... and, y'know, this is ... it's not AT&T here. We have limited resources of what you can spend to ...

DEN SIMMS: Well, I'm really grateful to Steve Vai, and I guess, uh, who was the clarinet player? What was his name?

FRANK ZAPPA: David Ocker.

DEN SIMMS: David Ocker, for doing the work that they did for the guitar book.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah, and also, another copyist was Richard Emmet, another very good copyist. [21]

DEN SIMMS: Well, a definite thanks to those guys, at least from me, for certain. Here's another thing that causes people like us, who like to archive stuff, and collect stuff, and know what stuff is, that sort of causes us headaches, and gives me a little bit of a challenge, which I like, which is the fact that certain songs wind up having different names as time goes by. A good example of this is "Monde" [m] being put out on a recording as "Let's Move to Cleveland", and also being known as "Kreeg-ah Bundolo". How does that happen with songs? Os that done purposefully, or just, y'know, what happens with that?

"A guy who wears a leisure suit with an enormous medallion, that's 'monde' according to Colaiuta. So the title was 'Young and Monde', the idea that someone could be mond before their time."

FRANK ZAPPA: OK, well, the song ... that's got an interesting history. In 1968 ... I can't remember the guy's name, but he was a concert violinist. He asked me to write something for him, so I started writing a piece for violin and piano and that's where "Monde" came from. "Monde" is ... I never completed the piece for violin and piano, but there was enough if a group of sketches for the thing, that I could, at the point where I had a band who could actually play it, I could build a stage arrangement out of the group of sketches that were originally destined for violin and piano. The first band that tried to play it was the band with Roy Estrada, Terry Bozzio, Napoleon and Andre Lewis.

DEN SIMMS: Exactly. Right. Sort of a prototype of what came later.

FRANK ZAPPA: That's right, and at that time, it was called "Canard du Jour". [22]

DEN SIMMS: Aaah. Yeah. I'd heard that phrase, and ...

FRANK ZAPPA: "Duck of the Day". So ... that didn't go very far, and the next time I had a band that was capable of playing it, it was the band with Vinnie as the Drummer. [23]

DEN SIMMS: 1980.

FRANK ZAPPA: No, Logeman was the drummer in '80. Vinnie came along ... after ...

DEN SIMMS: Yeah. Vinnie was there in '78 too, I guess, and '79. [24]

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah. "Monde" is a concept that was developed by Colaiuta. You know the drummer on the Tonight Show, Ed Shaunessy?

DEN SIMMS: Sure.

FRANK ZAPPA: OK. Ed Shaunessy is "monde". A guy who wears a leisure suit with an enormous medallion [laughter], that's "monde" according to Colaiuta. So, the title was "Young and Monde", the idea that a person could be monde before their time, OK?

DEN SIMMS: I see. Yeah.

FRANK ZAPPA: And that's why we used to sing at the end "So young and monde", OK? But, you talk about obscure, how ya gonna get that concept across to anybody, other than sittin' and doin' an interview like this? Um ... "Kreeg-ah Bundolo" came about as a result of a conversation with Ike about the old Tarzan books, where all the fake native talk that they used to have in the books [laughter], y'know, like, that's the way that natives talk in Tarzan books. "Kreeg-ah bundolo. White man come. Fire sticks kill." [n][laughter] All that kinda stuff. And then, "Bon-do-lay-boffo-bonto" was contributed by Ray White, who claims that it is a Swahili expression meaning "white people taste good" [much laughter], or "white people are good eating", or something, I don't know what ... but, that was the joke that he contributed, so ... we did that for a tour. And then, "Let's Move to Cleveland", we got tired of singing "kreeg-ah bundolo" at the end of the end of the song, and it was just, like, the secret word would be, on those shows in '84, we would change what we would sing at the end of that song. It wouldn't always be "Let's Move to" something else. It could be anything. You get a bunch of syllables that'll fit that part of the song, and you just sing it. That audience in Cleveland was so good, that's the reason we sang it and the end of that performance ... "Let's move to Cleveland".

DEN SIMMS: Alright. Some other things that you've done that with ... "Moggio"/"What's New in Baltimore". I had some conversations with Scott early in the tour, and asked him about that, and he told me that as that was being rehearsed, that it went through several names, if memory serves me right, that it started off as being "Mystery Studio Song" ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: ... then went to "Furnished Singles" ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Um-Hmm.

DEN SIMMS: ... and then "Ne Pas Déranger", is that correct? In French, saying "do not disturb"?

"Diva was just waking up, and she was telling me about this dream that she had, that she had a tiny, little father named "Moggio" who lived under the pillow, and all this stuff, and that's where the thing came from."

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: And then, I suppose for the releasing of the recordings, you broke the thing in half, kinda, and released one as "Baltimore" and one as "Moggio".

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: So, that's the evolution, titlewise, of that.

FRANK ZAPPA: Right. Now, the story about what "Moggio" is, that's another strange story.

DEN SIMMS: Yes. Tell us that.

FRANK ZAPPA: One day, when Diva was real young, she crawled into bed with us, and I was going to bed, like, seven o'clock in the morning, and she had been sleeping in bed with Gail during the night. As I got into bed, she was just waking up, and she was telling me about this dream that she had, that she had a tiny, little father named "Moggio" who lived under the pillow, and went on with all this stuff, y'know, and gave me a complete scenario about this character that she was familiar with. So that's where the thing came from. Then, I found out a couple of years later, that one of the bus drivers, in fact, the

driver on the '84 tour, that was his name! [laughter] His last name was Moggio! Mojo! Or somethin' like that. It was so weird! It is not a normal kind of a ...

ERIC BUXTON: Maybe she heard someone sayin' it ...

FRANK ZAPPA: No! I mean, she wouldn'ta heard me said it.

DEN SIMMS: Cosmik coincidence.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: OK. Of things along this line, and having to do with Diva, she came up with the concept for "Chana in de Bushwop". Is that right?

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: And yet, I don't quite understand about some aspect of that, like the French talk, and all that. What is that all about?

[Numerous members of the Zappa family enter with a very cute dalmatian puppy.]

FRANK ZAPPA: Oooh! Fabulous! [laughter]

AHMET ZAPPA: This dog is so cute ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Oooh! Look at that ...

DWEEZIL ZAPPA: The newest member of the Zappa family.

FRANK ZAPPA: Look at that face!

MOON ZAPPA: She says "Hello" ... [laughs]

FRANK ZAPPA: Oh, boy! You're a beauty! Does Dogess like her?

DWEEZIL ZAPPA: I think so.

FRANK ZAPPA: Is it a female?

AHMET ZAPPA: Yeah.

FRANK ZAPPA: Oh ... it's so adorable ...

ERIC BUXTON: Oh, it's so cute.

AHMET ZAPPA: What's it's name?

FRANK ZAPPA: Do I have to name it now, on the spot? How about Spot? [laughter]

DWEEZIL ZAPPA: We thought Toaster might be good.

FRANK ZAPPA: Toaster? Alright!

DWEEZIL ZAPPA: Tezmordo. Tezmordo's good ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Can I hold her?

AHMET ZAPPA: It's so cute.

DWEEZIL ZAPPA: It does have a little bit of a wind problem ...

AHMET ZAPPA: Frank, can I just tell ya how awesome this dog is?

FRANK ZAPPA: How awesome is it?

AHMET ZAPPA: No one could find it in the store. It escaped, and ran put to us. Like outside. We were outside at the escalators, out of the store. It found us.

DWEEZIL ZAPPA: It wanted to come home with us.

AHMET ZAPPA: It totally found us.

DWEEZIL ZAPPA: The dog did somersaults.

AHMET ZAPPA: The woman was, like, panic-stricken, and like, came outside to ... "Is that your dog?" I go "Yeah! We didn't buy any other dog." She said "Did you guys come in and get it?", and I go "No. The dog just ran out here."

FRANK ZAPPA: What a cute little dog.

DWEEZIL ZAPPA: I knew, though, when Gail came along onto the scene ...

AHMET ZAPPA: You decorated your tree, Frank!

FRANK ZAPPA: Eric Buxton did the tree. The dynamic Eric.

ERIC BUXTON: It's still lopsided. I think it gives it character.

AHMET ZAPPA: This dog is so cute.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yes, but it's quivering. It's nervous. It's, like, sensitive. It doesn't know what's goin' on here. Well, after it's gotten acquainted ... have the cats batted it yet, in the nose?

[At this point, the puppy emits an invisible cloud of deadly fumes.]

FRANK ZAPPA: OOOH!!!

ALL: [much laughter]

FRANK ZAPPA: That little ... Oooh! That dog **DOES** have a breeze problem! [much laughter] No wonder it's quivering. [much laughter]

[exit Zappa family]

DEN SIMMS: [laughs] How many pets does the Zappa household have?

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, that's gonna be dog number two [after Dogess]. Well, let's see. We've got a white cat named Tweezer, which is actually wild, and it doesn't come in the house very often, 'cause the other cats don't like it, but it eats outside every morning about five or six o'clock ...

DEN SIMMS: And its name is Tweezer?

FRANK ZAPPA: Tweezer, yeah, and then there's the legendary Marsh Moff, the black one that sits on your shoulder and drools. [laughter] She is now commuting between our house and somebody else's house, and she occasionally comes over and drools all over the place. And then there's two black and white cats. One's named Spot, which is a male, and that's one of the reasons Marsh Moff isn't here so often, because Spot's been chasin' her out. And there's another black and white Persian called Fightey Bitey, which is the cat that rules the roost. She swats everybody else around. And there's a gray and white cat named Bill ...

DEN SIMMS: Yeah, I met him.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah. That's a nice one.

DEN SIMMS: Yeah. He's real nice.

FRANK ZAPPA: And we have a snake, and a turtle.

DEN SIMMS: What sort of snake?

FRANK ZAPPA: Gopher snake. It came in as an infant. It sneaked into the recording studio one day when the door was open, and at first we thought it was a rattlesnake, a baby rattlesnake.

DEN SIMMS: Yeah, they look like 'em.

FRANK ZAPPA: Then we looked it up and found out it was a gopher snake, and Diva wanted to adopt it, so we got a terrarium, and we put it up there, in back of the kitchen.

DEN SIMMS: Have you been able to feed it?

FRANK ZAPPA: Baby mice. Pinky mice, they're called.

DEN SIMMS: Yeah, sure.

FRANK ZAPPA: Now it shares its tank with the turtle, but it's getting so big that I think we're gonna have to allow it to go back to nature, because when it gets hungry, it'll now snap at Diva. It bit her the other day, so she can't play with it any more.

DEN SIMMS: OK. Back to Diva and "Chana in de Bushwop". What's the explanation on that one?

FRANK ZAPPA: Putting the French stuff in?

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah. Just what's the general meaning of that song?

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, y'know, the meaning is "let's entertain ourselves". I mean, the whole story of Chana is not contained in the song. The only part of the Chana story that Diva told me was "she lives in a tree, she's nine foot three ..." and the other parts of her story, that she told, is that Chana is a ghost, and the things that Chana does, they're not included in the song. So, I just took part of it, and then extrapolated it out into somethin' else.

ERIC BUXTON: Were all your kids as creative as she is, at this age?

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, remember "Frogs with Dirty Little Lips" was Ahmet's idea.

DEN SIMMS: Yeah, sure. Yeah. I saw you rehearsing that, I think, in Berkely, the day before that was performed. [25]

FRANK ZAPPA: Um-hm.

DEN SIMMS: That was one of the first times I got to sit in on one of your rehearsals, y'know, and we were dyin'. We were in hysterics on that one.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah, I think that's a nice little song. The secret part of "Frogs with Dirty Little Lips" is there's a musical joke in there. [Frank sings] [26]

DEN SIMMS: Sure.

FRANK ZAPPA: That is a type of cadence that was used in very ancient music. It's called the Landini cadence.

DEN SIMMS: I'd heard you use that phrase before, and wondered what it was. Yeah.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah. I mean ... you know what a cadence is?

DEN SIMMS: Sure. Of course.

FRANK ZAPPA: So you know the ones they use today. Plagial cadence, and, y'know, the other ...

DEN SIMMS: Right.

FRANK ZAPPA: So, the Landini has this funny resolution, and it's the sound of medieval music that I always enjoyed. But, if you do it over and over again, it's no longer a cadence. It's a hook.

DEN SIMMS: Right. Exactly. [laughs]

FRANK ZAPPA: Now it's the Landini hook that's in that song.

DEN SIMMS: [laughs] Alright. Let's see what else we got here.

ROB SAMLER: Did you ever find a name for Mouldred, or a place to use that name?

FRANK ZAPPA: Mouldred? Not yet.

DEN SIMMS: You've been toying with that one for a while, huh?

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah, well, y'know. They come, they go ...

DEN SIMMS: Maybe the new dog can be called Mouldred.

FRANK ZAPPA: That doesn't look like a Mouldred. [laughter] That's a cute dog. It's gotta get that fuckin' dietary problem straight [much laughter] 'cause that dog can ...

ERIC BUXTON: It's probably what they fed him at the store.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah. Musta been a burrito! [hysterical laughter]

"I believe Howard [Kaylan] made the statement that he didn't really feel that he could go on stage, at this point in his career, and sing songs about blow jobs, and keep his new young audience. They decided that it would be bad for their career."

ROB SAMLER: Hey, what's a "Jack-in-the-Box ring job"?

FRANK ZAPPA: OK. There was an advertising campaign in 1969, with billboards all over Los Angeles, that showed this bag with onion rings dangling out of it, saying "Stop into Jack in the Box for a ring job." [hysterical laughter]

DEN SIMMS: Oh, that's hilarious!

FRANK ZAPPA: I heard that interview with Flo & Eddie in New York [27], and you mentioned that, so I figured I had to ask you that one, 'cause it sounded pretty mysterious.

ERIC BUXTON: They were just advertising rings?

FRANK ZAPPA: Onion rings.

DEN SIMMS: That interview, which you just did, where Flo & Eddie called you, you all sounded like you were enjoyin' that. A lot of good laughs all the way around.

FRANK ZAPPA: Um-hm.

DEN SIMMS: I understand that they did some rehearsing with you, previous to the '88 tour, and ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Yep.

DEN SIMMS: Why didn't that work out?

FRANK ZAPPA: Because they decided it would be bad for their career.

DEN SIMMS: Um-hm. They were doing that nostalgia thing, right?

FRANK ZAPPA: That's right. Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: They figured that they would do better with that.

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, I believe Howard made the statement that he didn't really feel that he could go on stage, at this point in his career, and sing songs about blow jobs, and, y'know, keep his new young audience [laughter], and I said "Fine."

DEN SIMMS: Such is life.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: Yep. OK. Would you say that Conlon Nancarrow is the predecessor of what you do with the Synclavier?

FRANK ZAPPA: Not completely. Certainly there's a huge influence, conceptually, in what Nancarrow did. In fact, when Nancarrow was in southern California, I tried to get him to come over, so I could demonstrate the machine to him, because here's a guy who pioneered a type of sequencer music, using a player piano, but it's a limited timbre. It's only the sound of that one instrument ...

DEN SIMMS: Right. That's right.

FRANK ZAPPA: ... and I just thought that the way his mind works, if he would learn how to use the Synclavier, [he] would be able to hear all different kinds of things out of it, but I never got him to come over, and I doubt whether he's ever gonna get into it, but, y'know, I have to tip my hat to him, certainly.

DEN SIMMS: He lives in Mexico City, doesn't he?

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: Yeah, he's come up with some interesting stuff. How did your association with Nicholas Slonimsky come about?

FRANK ZAPPA: When I was invited to be the host of this Edgar Varèse memorial concert ...

DEN SIMMS: In San Francisco? [28]

FRANK ZAPPA: No. In New York, at the Palladium. [29]

DEN SIMMS: Oh, yeah.

FRANK ZAPPA: ... I erroneously thought that since I was supposed to be introducing the works, that the audience would appreciate some background facts about his life, and stuff like that, that would be informative, not realizing the typical New York audience that would appear would be more "Hey, Frank! Hey ..." [Frank imitates rowdy audience sounds in a way which is impossible to translate into print] ... and all this kinda stuff, and they didn't wanna know.

DEN SIMMS: Right.

FRANK ZAPPA: But I didn't know that. So, to prepare myself for this, I knew that Slonimsky lived in Los Angeles, and since he conducted the premier of "Ionisations", I thought I would meet him, and talk to him, and get some inside information, and that's how I met him.

Nicholas Slonimsky

DEN SIMMS: I see. Yeah. OK. Yeah, that's right. I had heard somewhere that he had conducted that premier.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: Back in '67, the Mothers played some music at a Grammy awards ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: ... where you guys supposedly did some real bent version of ...

FRANK ZAPPA: "Satin Doll".

DEN SIMMS: ... "Satin Doll". Tell us about that.

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, we were hired as the entertainment at this Grammy awards show, and Duke Ellington was actually in the audience, by the way. [30] Woody Herman, I believe, was the band that would play the music when people got awards, and we were brought on to do a little fifteen-minute set, and this is a room full of people in tuxedos, and y'know, all fancy, fancy, fancy ...

DEN SIMMS: This was before the Grammy awards were more of a rock-music-oriented thing, right?

FRANK ZAPPA: That's tight. Remember, in the old days, they didn't even want to give you awards for rock music, y'know, and it's only recently that I think they're even talking about giving you awards for rap music – not exactly on the forefront of musical expression.

DEN SIMMS: Exactly.

FRANK ZAPPA: So, we did our show with broken dolls, and rancid versions of ... y'know, just the type of ugliness that we used to do in 1967 [including "Satin Doll"]. After our set was over, I walked out, I think it was in the Hilton Ballroom, where we did this, and I walked off of the stage, and I was on my way to the toilet. This woman in an evening gown was walking towards me, and as she passed me, she said, under her breath, "That's the most **DISGUSTING** thing I've ever seen in my life", and I went "**HEY! YOU! C'MERE!**" And she stopped dead in her tracks, and walked over to me, just right up to me, and I stuck my face right in her face, and I, just as loud as I could, said "**YOU'RE A PIG!**" [laughter], and she was **STUNNED**! [laughter] It was like, the result was like if you took a wind-up toy, and hit it with a hammer, and it went crazy [laughter], and it started twirling around the room. [laughter] She didn't know where to go. She was "[Frank imitates the sound of a matronly socialite in befuddled confusion, which is impossible to translate into print]" [laughter], and she was just going around in circles out there in the lobby. [laughter]

DEN SIMMS: Oh, God. Oh, my. That's pretty funny ... um ... we've heard a little thing, that you used to open up the shows with, I believe in '78, called either "Revenge ..." or "Attack of the Knick-Knack People". What is it? Was it "revenge" or "attack"? Let's clear that up.

FRANK ZAPPA: [thoughtful pause] I can't remember, 'cause my tapes in there just say "Knick-Knack". Um ... OK. Remember I told ya about that period when I couldn't get a record contract, and I was just doing little shitty experiments here in the basement? That's part of what I was doing, gluing those little pieces of tape.

DEN SIMMS: Right. Doing that editing. When were the things that you glued together, when were those recorded? At that same time, or ...

FRANK ZAPPA: No, no, no, no ...

DEN SIMMS: I mean, I get the feeling that they sound **Lumpy Gravy**-ish, and ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah, it's all earlier sound sources.

DEN SIMMS: Was that put together for the exclusive use of putting on at the beginning of shows, or was it just a project that you did, and ...

FRANK ZAPPA: It was just a sound object that I wanted to make, just choppin' tape together, and then, since there was no way to release it anyplace, I thought people might enjoy hearing it, and we used it to open the show.

DEN SIMMS: Right. OK. Um ...

FRANK ZAPPA: I think it was "**CURSE** of the Knick-Knack People". [o]

DEN SIMMS: "Curse of the Knick-Knack People". Alright. Um ... you said emphatically that you were pretty distraught with the result of working with the LSO [London Symphony Orchestra] ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Um-hm.

DEN SIMMS: ... and all those problems. Did you feel any better about what happened with the concerts in Berkeley [31], and with that orchestra? Did they treat your stuff any better?

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, look, Kent is very fine and dedicated conductor, and the Berkeley [Symphony] Orchestra really put a lot of effort into it, but based on what I heard on the tapes, I mean, some parts, for example, of "Mo & Herb's Vacation" and "Bob in Dacron", they're playing them better than the LSO, faster, more accurately, but all in all, there's just not enough time or enough money to get everything nailed down to a really perfect ...

the program from the BSO concert

DEN SIMMS: Still the same basic problem.

FRANK ZAPPA: It's the same basic problem. It's an enormous amount of notes that you have to learn, to do a whole evening of that stuff, and when it's all unfamiliar, if the evening would consist of one of my pieces, and all the rest, things that they already knew, then, y'know, you could've probably had a better result from the concert, because there's less material they have to learn from scratch. They've already played Beethoven's Fifth, so there's never a problem there. If the music is brand new, nobody's ever seen it before, and they don't know how to play it, and if you're writing it in an idiom which is not a familiar idiom, you're gonna have performance problems. You have to be realistic about it.

DEN SIMMS: What about the visual content of it? How much did you enjoy that, the puppets, and such?

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, there were certain parts of the puppet show that they couldn't finish on time, like the enormous wives from "Mo & Herb's Vacation". They never completed those things, so everything that was in the scenario, as it was written for the ballet, it wasn't all there. That was just another budgetary thing.

DEN SIMMS: What's "Dwell"? [a2]

FRANK ZAPPA: What is "Dwell"? Well, "Dwell" is a screenplay. It's extracted from the **Them Or Us** book. [p] What I've done is I've put together a 102-page screenplay that I've brought up to date. In fact, I worked on it about five days ago, and made some changes in it. I sent a copy of it to my new agent at ICM [32] to see whether he'll send it around, and then, a couple of days later, Beverly D'Angelo was over here, and we sat around, and we read the whole script. We had a bunch of laughs. She had never seen it before.

DEN SIMMS: Yeah. I saw here on [Late Night with David] Letterman the other night, where she had said something about ... I wasn't really listening to it, and she said the words "harder than your husband", and I went [Den demonstrates having his attention caught, and whipping his head around to see] ...

FRANK ZAPPA: She sang it in this new film she just did. [33]

DEN SIMMS: OK. It's a film?

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: OK. We'll be waitin' for that. What about the three groups that you had back in the early seventies, one of which is commonly known as the Hot Rats ensemble? Is that a proper name for that group?

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah. It only played a couple of shows. We did San Diego, and we did the Olympic Auditorium. [34]

DEN SIMMS: And then there was the Grand Wazoo, and a scaled-down version known ...

FRANK ZAPPA: The Petit Wazoo.

DEN SIMMS: ... as the Petit Wazoo. Is that, again, the correct way to think of that band?

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: OK.

ERIC BUXTON: What was the inspiration for "Evelyn, a Modified Dog"?

"You know all the people inside the piano in LUMPY GRAVY? OK. Picture a dog, sitting in the corner watching human beings do that."

FRANK ZAPPA: Lemme think about that. Good question [Frank pauses to consume a chocolate drop] ... You know all the people inside the piano in **Lumpy Gravy**?

DEN SIMMS: Um-hm.

FRANK ZAPPA: OK. Picture a dog, sitting in the corner watching human beings do that. [laughter]

ERIC BUXTON: We spent the day at the Los Angeles Zoo, and the orangutans were doin' that. They were lookin' at us like "What are these people doin', this constant procession of people?"

FRANK ZAPPA: Um-hm. They're in there going "What a miserable life, walkin' past cages, lookin' at a ..."

DEN SIMMS: Tell us about a composition that the old Mothers used to do that you called "The String Quartet", which we know of as "Pound for a Brown"/"Sleeping in a Jar". Why was that called "The String Quartet"?

FRANK ZAPPA: Because it was written when I was in high school, and it was a string quartet.

DEN SIMMS: I see. So that's the origins of those two compositions, the melodies that we would associate with those two songs originated from a high-school string quartet.

FRANK ZAPPA: Um-hm. '58.

DEN SIMMS: I see. Alright. There's also somethin' that the only title I've ever heard associated with it was something that was just loosely called "Ballet Music", which was some themes. Are you familiar with that, what that was? Cal you tell me anything about that? It came from the same time era.

FRANK ZAPPA: No, a bit later. That eventually would up in "Greggery Peccary". Those things were written during the '69 tour.

DEN SIMMS: OK. Also in "Greggery Peccary", there's a part of that that the Grand Wazoo was playing, which I think of as being "New Brown Clouds". Was that, at that time, a composition unto itself, or was that part of "Greggery Peccary"?

FRANK ZAPPA: It was part of "Greggery Peccary". "Greggery Peccary" was written in 1972, while I was in the wheelchair.

DEN SIMMS: Uh-huh. Ah. I see.

FRANK ZAPPA: And so was "Hunchentoot".

DEN SIMMS: Yeah. OK. Speaking of "Hunchentoot", who were the vocalists that you worked with back then, particularily the female vocalist? Who was that?

FRANK ZAPPA: God, I can't remember her name. Brooke ...?

ROB SAMLER: Was it Florence Marley?

FRANK ZAPPA: Nooo! No ...

DEN SIMMS: No. That was from a movie. That was from "Space Boy", or somethin ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Florence Marley! She was in this, um, science-fiction movie ...

DEN SIMMS: **QUEEN OF BLOOD**. [q]

FRANK ZAPPA: ... where she plays a vampire from Mars. [laughter]

DEN SIMMS: What about the string quartet you wrote called "None of the Above", and there's the wind quintet, "Times Beach"? Will we ever get to hear them?

FRANK ZAPPA: You'll hear a piano version of "Times Beach" in **Phase Three**. [r]

DEN SIMMS: I see. What's the origins of "Sink Trap"/"Gypsy Airs"?

FRANK ZAPPA: [another pause for chocolate] All the music that was put together for the **Lumpy Gravy** album, these were done in segments. Excuse me, I'm tryin' to finish eatin' my candy here.

DEN SIMMS: Oh, feel free.

FRANK ZAPPA: Alright, let's see. It was, uh ... '66. This guy named Nick Venet, who was a producer at Capitol, came to me, and offered me the chance to write something for a forty-piece orchestra, to do a recording of that kind of stuff. I looked at my contract with MGM, 'cause we were signed with MGM at the time. Nowhere in my contract did it preclude me from being a composer, or a conductor. So long as I didn't perform on an album that was released by another company, I didn't think I had a problem.

DEN SIMMS: By "performing", you mean something with an instrument.

"In 1966, Nick Venet offered me the opportunity to write [LUMPY GRAVY]. I thought 'Whoa! This is fabulous. I'll just dive in there and compose my little buns off, and I'll get this performance.' I was writing around the clock."

FRANK ZAPPA: Right. I wasn't singin', I wasn't playin'.

DEN SIMMS: Right.

FRANK ZAPPA: Nonetheless, MGM refused to allow this album to be released, and there was an argument over it for a year, finally resulting in MGM buying the master tape from Capitol, and then, I added the vocal parts in there, and it came out. [s] But in '66, I used to live in this little house on Kirkwood, and I was renting this place, and this is right about the time Venet offered me this opportunity to write this music. I thought "Whoa! This is fabulous. I'll just dive in there and start composing my little buns off, and I'll get this performance." Well, shortly after receiving this commission, the landlord notifies me that his son, who is a dentist from the Midwest, is moving back to California, and we should get out of the house, so he can have his son move in. So, I got evicted. I have to move. I've got a deadline to do the recording session, I've got all this music to write, and I've got no place to do it. So **Lumpy Gravy**, all

the music to that was written in these locations: the office adjoining Nick Venet's office at Capitol Records, after six PM, 'cause they had a little piano in there, and I would go down there, and work in there for a few hours; then I wrote part of it at the Tropicana Motel, with no piano, because we had to live there; and then, um, I took a short-term rental on another house in the Canyon, just prior to the recording sessions, and I was writing around the clock, and I had copyists coming over there at three o'clock in the morning and pick up chunks of the score, and go off, and copy the parts, OK? So, to answer your question, where do these titles come from? You gotta name these segments something, because you have pieces of it going out the door. It wasn't one whole finished thing, 'cause it had to be done in an assembly-line process, so ... there ya go, "Sink Trap".

DEN SIMMS: It had to be ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Name it something. Get it out the door.

DEN SIMMS: It had to be identified in some way.

FRANK ZAPPA: Right. It goes back to what Varèse used to say: "Why do you call pieces 'Density 21.5' and 'Ionisations'?" He said "It serves as a convenient means of cataloging the work." [laughter] You could call it "Buddy". You could call it "Mouldred". [laughter] You could call it "Billy". You could call it "Sink Trap".

DEN SIMMS: What about the album **Apostrophe (')**? Was that like that, or is **Apostrophe (')** a concept?

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, an apostrophe is that funny little thing, y'know, that dangles at the end of the word denoting ...

DEN SIMMS: And it has a certain function.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah. It has functions. It denotes ownership.

DEN SIMMS: Ownership. OK. Is that what you were thinkin' of when you ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah. [t]

DEN SIMMS: Gettin' back to "Hunchentoot", are there any other songs that we'd be familiar with, that came about from "Hunchentoot", other than "Flambay", "Spider of Destiny", "Planet of My Dreams" and "Time Is Money"? Anything else besides those four that we ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Not that have been recorded ... oh, yeah! Wait. There's another one that's in the script. That's, um ... "Think It Over" ... "If something gets in your way, just think it over". Well, that's the **Grand Wazoo** theme. [Frank hums it]

DEN SIMMS: Right. Oh, right. Sure.

FRANK ZAPPA: That's what it gets sung to.

DEN SIMMS: Right. As you were humming "Think It Over", I was tryin' to think of what that is, and that was what you called what we think of as "The Grand Wazoo", at the time it was being performed live.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah. Um-hm.

DEN SIMMS: Yes. OK.

FRANK ZAPPA: But the other songs that Hunchentoot sings, like "The Hunchentootin' Blues", and, um, "Oh Me, Oh My, Lonely Spider Wanna Die", those have never been recorded.

DEN SIMMS: Alright. Here's a controversy you can settle. There are many people who think that you performed, in 1969, at a festival in Belgium called "Amougies" ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Yes.

DEN SIMMS: ... performed on stage with Pink Floyd. True or false?

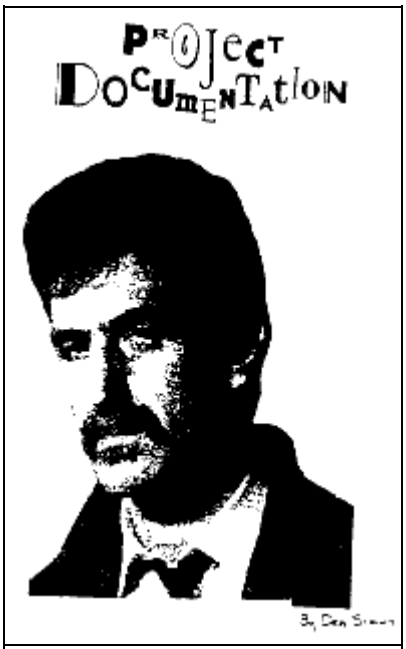
FRANK ZAPPA: Not with Pink Floyd.

DEN SIMMS: That's what I thought. You introduced Beefheart to the audience ...

FRANK ZAPPA: Yes, and I introduced a lot of other acts, too. You see, that was a very weird thing. I was hired to be a master of ceremonies ...

DEN SIMMS: Gotcha.

FRANK ZAPPA: That was after the Mothers had broken up, and y'know, I had time on my hands. These people contacted me. They offered me ten thousand dollars to be an emcee at a festival, all expenses paid, and go over there, and, y'know, whatever I wanted to do, and I said "Fine." So, I get there, and they neglected to tell me that nobody spoke English. [laughter] I mean, most of the people there spoke French, and all I could do was point and wave [laughter], and furthermore, the festival was originally supposed to be in France. The French government stopped it, and so, at the last minute, it was moved across the border to Belgium, into the middle of a turnip patch, in the middle of nowhere, in a tent that was held up by steel girders. This tent held fifteen thousand people. Freezing cold, damp weather, constant fog, the most **MISERABLE**[laughter] circumstances you could find yourself in, and was a 24-hour-a-day festival, and the kids would come there, and they had their sleeping bags, and they were sleeping through ... they were just in this tent **FREEZING**, laying on the ground, sleeping, while music went on around the clock with all these groups ...



front page of PD

DEN SIMMS: How bizarre.

FRANK ZAPPA: ... and they were filming it.

DEN SIMMS: A true war story.

ROB SAMLER: So, did you perform with anyone?

DEN SIMMS: Yeah. To nail that down once and for all, you did not perform with Pink Floyd, right?

FRANK ZAPPA: No. I think I performed with Aynsley Dunbar, and then there was this jam session that had Archie Shepp, Philly Joe Jones, and some other jazz guys that played.

DEN SIMMS: OK.

Short Interruption

[As the conversation resumes, Rob has just shown Frank an article from the English magazine **Guitarist** (which we reprinted on page 54 of our first issue of **Society Pages**).]

FRANK ZAPPA: I saw it.

ROB SAMLER: [the photo] looks kind of familiar.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah, that's great.

ROB SAMLER: I guess he [Scott] must've given them this picture that Eric took, and sent Scott, and they put it in here, but they didn't give Eric any photo credit. [u]

FRANK ZAPPA: Not a bad picture, Eric.

ROB SAMLER: Yeah. Scott caught in a pensive mood.

ERIC BUXTON: I caught him in a good mood.

FRANK ZAPPA: Uh-huh. Well, that was a rare occasion.

DEN SIMMS: Did you ever get a hold of a thing that I tried to get to you, I'll call it a study, that I did of the '88 tour, which I called **Project Documentation**? You never got a hold of that?

FRANK ZAPPA: Unh-unh.

DEN SIMMS: [to Rob] Do you have a copy of that?

ROB SAMLER: Here it is.

ERIC BUXTON: It's exhaustive.

DEN SIMMS: Anyway, please have that.

FRANK ZAPPA: [Frank takes a look] Jeezuss! [laughter]

ROB SAMLER: Here, you might as well keep it in this envelope.

FRANK ZAPPA: [Frank continues to examine the document] Thanks! Y'know, I'm really honored that you guys take the time, or that you have the interest to do this stuff.

ERIC BUXTON: We feel it's our duty.

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, y'know, I'm flattered and honored, and I mean that sincerely.

DEN SIMMS: [!!!] Well, believe us that the feeling's mutual, 'cause, again, as I think I said before, that, y'know, there's lots of these other "stars" out there that don't think this way, as far ask ... y'know, you know what I'm sayin'.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah, well, they should do it the other way.

DEN SIMMS: I mean, I've really appreciated the fact that you will allow the hardcores that hang out at the backstage door to slip in and see how the rehearsals are working, and for me, somebody that has a little musical background, that is really something else, to see how these things get assembled, and how things come together.

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, I think people should know that it's not just fun time out there. There's actual work involved, and it takes some skill in order to do that. Y'know, sometimes it looks pretty easy on stage, flipping around all those funny rhythms, and everything like that, but in order to learn it, it ain't easy ...

DEN SIMMS: Yeah.

FRANK ZAPPA: ... and I'm glad ya took an interest in it.

DEN SIMMS: Well, we do have an impression that you do appreciate the hardcores. These are the people that are your bread and butter, y'know. We purchase the releases when they come out.

FRANK ZAPPA: OK, but I'm not looking at you guys like bread and butter. I really take this as a compliment, as a personal compliment, because let's face it, there aren't that many hardcores, and that's not very much butter, and it's certainly no bread. The number of hardcores that are out there is tiny, and that, to me, it's not, like, addressing my income stream. My income stream comes from other sources.

"When I walked into this room, the guy thought he had seen a ghost, 'cause he never expected to see me in Moscow, and he started crying. He had pictures of his house in Siberia, posters of me on the wall, and a complete record collection. In Siberia!"

DEN SIMMS: Right. There is this ... I call it a grapevine, and the people who ardently like your music know that they're unusual, on [terms of] the mainstream, and so they tend to seek each other out, and so, there has, over the years, developed this little grapevine, and swapping of cassette tapes and newspaper articles, and all that sort of thing, and it's easily the best hobby I've ever had. It's a lot of fun.

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, let me tell you something, that this grapevine that you were talking about exists behind the Iron Curtain, and has for years.

DEN SIMMS: Yeah? I've been wonderin' about that.

FRANK ZAPPA: There is something called the "Frank Zappa Society of Czechoslovakia" ...

DEN SIMMS: Wow!

FRANK ZAPPA: ... that sent me ... well, they delivered to me, this dossier. It's around here someplace. It's a thing like this ... it looks like it's out of a spy movie, y'know. It's tied with a string ... it's like, all the evidence is in here, one of those little things tied with a string, and I opened it up, and there are photographs of their meetings. There's a guy standing at a podium. They got pictures of me on the wall, and he's delivering an address to this assembly of people. They're listening to tapes very, y'know, seriously studying this stuff, and then, in it was this little proclamation that was signed by all these people in Prague, and all this, and ... there's a guy from Holland. Do you know Co de Kloet?

DEN SIMMS: Um-hm.

FRANK ZAPPA: OK. Co recently came back from Czechoslovakia, and he went to record stores there, and none of my albums have been officially released, but if you go in the back room, every album is available on tae. They're all bootleg taped, just hand-inscribed, and so, the music has been there for years. And when I went into Russia, I was introduced to a guy who works in the Ministry of Culture, a total member of the Communist Party, with the red card, and the whole thing, a young guy, about thirty years old, who said he was pleased to meet me, because he earned his way through school by importing my tapes from Yugoslavia, and selling them in Russia, and now he works in the Ministry of Culture, and he got through school bootleggin' my stuff. [laughter] Also, one of the people that I met in Moscow, on the first trip, was a guitar player from a Siberian rhythm & blues band.

DEN SIMMS: Boy, that's just a pretty bizarre concept in itself.

FRANK ZAPPA: Well, when you hear the rest, you won't believe it, because when I walked into this room, the guy thought he had seen a ghost, 'cause he never expected to see me in Moscow, and he started crying, and he opened his wallet. He had pictures of his house in Siberia, posters of me on the wall, and a complete record collection. In Siberia.

DEN SIMMS: Wow!

FRANK ZAPPA: So, I listened to his band play, and talked with him, and I didn't have my business cards, but my lawyer was with me on this first trip, and he gave him his card. Two weeks ago, I received a letter from Siberia, from a friend of his. It was addressed to my lawyer. This guy had gone back to Siberia, and a friend of his, who's no longer a musician, wants to publish a book in the United States about Soviet rock musicians and their songs, not the official government ones, but all the underground Soviet rock musicians, and he's looking for a Western publisher. Here's this letter from Novosibirsk, with a phone number. I

tried to call the guy in Siberia. I couldn't get through, but eventually, I'm going to get him on the phone. It wasn't the same guy. It was yet another guy in Siberia. Last week we got ... one letter from East Germany, one from a place in Russia, which is right across the Finnish border, called Vyborg ... this guy had really great English. He wants to be a Russian distributor for Barfko-Swill products ... a letter from Kiev, and another letter from some other place in the Soviet Union, and we've been getting, regularly, letters from Hungary, from Poland, from all over the place.

DEN SIMMS: Is this stuff just happening as the Iron Curtain is coming down?

FRANK ZAPPA: That's right.

ROB SAMLER: So is there any chance you can put us in touch with these fellows?

FRANK ZAPPA: Yes, there is. I can give you, maybe, copies of their letters.

DEN SIMMS: Yeah, if they're interested in talking to Western Zappa fanatics, who are not only willing, but eager, just from the curiosity, and the, y'know, hands-across-the-ocean aspects of this stuff, to communicate with these people ...

Michael Kocb

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah. I really have to find that thing from Czechoslovakia, because I couldn't believe it. The work that went into putting this thing together. And then recently, um ... well, let's see, it was about four or five months ago ... there's a composer from Czechoslovakia named [Michael] Kocb, who writes music for movies. He writes operas. He writes, y'know, all different kinds of stuff, plus, he has a rhythm & blues, well, a rock & roll band of some sort [v], and he was in town, and came over to visit. He speaks not very much English, but enough that we could talk, and he told me what was going on in Czechoslovakia. He was part of the student protest movement, one of the people who was speaking out against the government, and he invited me to Prague. [35] They wanted to play some of my music there, and all the rest of this stuff. So I met, gradually, some of the people from different countries, either over there, or they come to my house. Two months after that visit, Czechoslovakian television came here, and filmed an interview out in the front yard, with a camera that looked like it was right out of World War II. [laughter] You could hear the thing creaking. It was a sixteen-millimeter camera. [laughter]

DEN SIMMS: God, that's great.

FRANK ZAPPA: And, I've done interviews for Hungarian television twice. They usually come when we play in Vienna. They come across the border, and this is before the Iron Curtain came down, but they were still coming down there and talking to me.

DEN SIMMS: So, you may have, perhaps, a whole new market, for what you do, opening up there in Eastern Europe.

FRANK ZAPPA: That's very true. We have two deal offers, right now, for distribution of records behind the Iron Curtain.

DEN SIMMS: That's great!

FRANK ZAPPA: Behind the non-existent Iron Curtain. One is for Czechoslovakia. The other is for Hungary.

DEN SIMMS: Somehow, I get struck by the impression, I don't know why, but perhaps those people on the other side of the Iron Curtain might be more respective to what might be thought of as some of the more arcane aspects of your music, that our type of living here in places like America and in Western Europe might have made people to bland to be able to deal with.

FRANK ZAPPA: Yeah.

DEN SIMMS: Maybe those people are so hungry, that they might be able to look at that in a different manner, and be able to appreciate it without all the other influences.

FRANK ZAPPA: They can't really appreciate it, because they don't really know what I'm talking about. You can't give 'em a song like "The Blue Light" and have 'em understand what "Winchell's Donuts" means.

DEN SIMMS: Sure.

FRANK ZAPPA: Oh, one of the weirdest letters that I got, about a yard long, written on toilet paper [laughter], in tiny handwriting, with cartoons, from a sergeant in the Soviet Air Force, who was in Afghanistan, who was saying how much he liked the albums, and he used to listen to them when he was in Afghanistan, and he heard that I had come to Russia, and that he wanted to see me, but he missed me, and all this stuff, and just the idea that this guy was bombing in Afghanistan [laughs], and maybe, listening to [laughs] "The Grand Wazoo", or something [laughter], while he was doing it. So weird.

DEN SIMMS: Very peculiar.

FRANK ZAPPA: Very peculiar.

Part 3 of our interview with Frank will conclude in our next issue. Don'tcha miss it!

Footnotes

1. "Outrage at Valdez".

2. In May 1989, Eric and Rob had visited with Frank, and at that time, Frank had told them about a Russian woman's product for which he was trying to find a distributor in the United States. The product was a liquid "sealer", that when applied to stone, brick, concrete, etc. would provide a completely invisible protection against the elements.

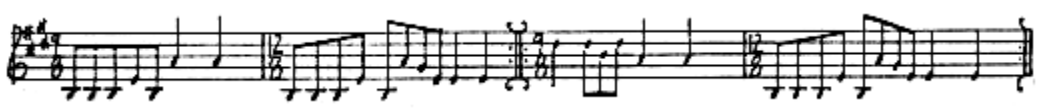
3. **Expanded Universe** by Robert A Heinlein – "Inside Intourist".

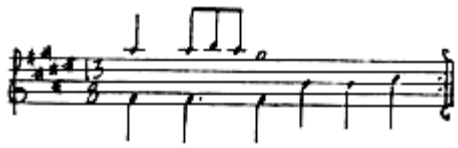
4. Intourist is the official Soviet tourism agency.

5. Earlier in the interview, Frank had spoken about his ability to separate propaganda from usable information when watching televised newscasts. (See issue 1, page 31, middle column.)

6. **Le Mystére des Voix Bulgares, Volumes I & II**.

7. Earlier during this interview, Eric had volunteered to decorate a bare Christmas tree which was sitting in a corner of the room. (See issue #1, page 17, right-hand column.)

8. "21 vamp" from "Marqueson's Chicken":

9. 13 vamp from "Trouble Comin' Every Day":



10. See issue #1, page 21.

11. See **VIDEO FROM HELL**.

12. The **Society Pages** board of experts have re-examined "Fallin' in Love is a Stupid Habit" and have concluded that it is indeed Frank.

13. On October 12 1986, Frank took part in a public panel discussion on censorship and other related subjects at the At My Place restaurant in Santa Monica.

14. On May 20 1984, the Exploratorium in San Francisco presented "Speaking of Music with Frank Zappa" at the Palace of Fine Arts, hosted by Charles Amirkhanian, a program of digitally taped music, conversation, audience questions, and **Francesco: the Almost Fictional Life of an Obscure Italian Composer**, a play written by Frank and read by actor Calvin Ahlgren.

15. On November 5 1986, Student Productions and Campus Entertainment presented "Frank Zappa, Lecture / Electronic Music Performance" at California State University, Northridge.

16. On April 5 1984, Frank was invited to deliver the keynote address at a convention of the American Society of University Composers at the University of Ohio in Columbus. (See **The Real Frank Zappa Book**, pages 189-194.)

17. Earlier in the interview, Frank had spoken about the shooting of a documentary at his house that had occurred a short time before. (See issue #1, page 17, left-hand column.)

18. Both "Make a Sex Noise" and "Irish Eyes / Godfather" were performed on March 17 1988 at Broome County Arena, Binghampton, New York.

19. Both "Star Wars Won't Work" and "Stairway to Star Wars" were performed on May 24 1988 at Martin Schleyer-Halle, Stuttgart, West Germany.

20. The unreleased **Mystery Disc** CD is a combining of the two records of the same name that were included as part of the first two **Old Masters** boxed sets. [i]

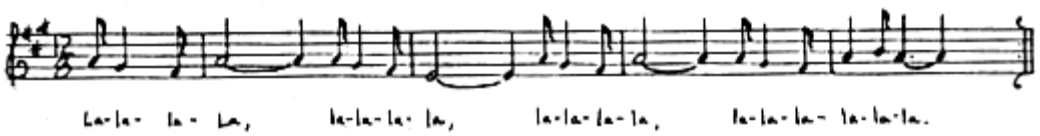
21. Arthur Jarvinen and Lee Scott were also contributing transcribers in **The Frank Zappa Guitar Book**.

22. The editors know of three performances of "Canard du Jour": December 26 1975 at the Paramount Theatre in Oakland, California; December 27 1975 at Winterland in San Francisco; and January 23 1976 at Festival Hall in Melbourne, Australia. (Do not be confused with the title "Canard du Jour". It has no musical connection whatsoever with the duets with Jean-Luc Ponty of the same name that appear on **Shut Up & Play Yer Guitar**.)

23. On April 1 1980 at Bekeley Community Theatre in Berkeley, California, Frank introduced "Young and Mond" as a world premier.

24. The drummer in that band was David Logeman, whose tenure with Frank lasted from February to August of 1980. Vinnie was with Frank from August 1978 until December 1980 except for the tour that David Logeman participated in.

25. The rehearsal of "Frogs with Dirty Little Lips" that Den witnessed was on December 10 1981, at Bekeley Community Theatre. Its only performance was the next night at the Santa Monica Civic Center.

26. The "Landini" cadence (hook) from "Frogs with Dirty Little Lips":

27. Flo & Eddie conducted a telephone interview with Frank on November 16 1989 on WXRK, New York City.

28. Frank conducted several Edgard Varèse compositions at a concert commemorating the one-hundredth birtdays of Varèse and Anton Webern on February 9 1983 at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco.

29. The performance, on April 17 1981, was entitled "A Tribute to Edgard Varèse".

30. Duke Ellington is the composer of "Satin Doll".

31. The Berkeley Symphony presented "A Zappa Affair" at Zellerbach Auditorium in Berkeley, California on June 16 1984.

32. International Creative Management.

33. **DADDY'S DYIN' ... WHO'S GOT THE WILL?**

34. The Hot Rats ensemble played on February 8 1970 at the San Diego Sports Arena and March 7 1970 at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles.

35. Michael Kocb has since become an elected member of Czechoslovakian parliament.

Extra Notes to the HTML Version

a. "over"?

b. You can read more about Rondo Hatton at Rondo "The Creeper" Hatton.

c. In 1991, **You Can't Do That on Stage Anymore Volume 4** was released, featuring a version of "The Man from Utopia" where Zappa mentions this Sanavio character.

d. "Lost in a Whirlpool" was released on **The Lost Episodes** in 1996.

e. In the **Lost Episodes** booklet, the date for "Lost in a Whirlpool" is given as 1958 or '59.

f. We have made some very minor corrections to the lyrics that appeared in the original article, on the justification that the recording available on **The Lost Episodes** is clearer than the bootleg versions that have circulated, so that it's easier to make out the words. The last lines, though, are debatable: the original article had "tug those strings" and "in a noose" where we have "plunk those stringers" and "in the noose" – and while it may be a toss-up between "tug" and plunk", "stringers" and "the noose" are clear enough, "in the noose" rendered particularly hilarious by Vliet's pronunciation, hinting at a /nju:z/ glide ("in the news").

g. Released in 1994 as **Civilization Phaze III**.

h. "Make a Sex Noise" was released in 1992 on **You Can't Do That on Stage Anymore Volume 6**. "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" and the **GODFATHER** theme were ended up on **The Best Band You Never Heard in Your Life** after all, when it was released in 1991. "Stairway to Star Wars" has not been released, but "Star Wars Won't Work" was released on **Make a Jazz Noise Here**, also in 1991.

i. **Mystery Disc** was eventually released on CD in 1998.

j. **The Lost Episodes** wasn't released until 1996.

k. A "reference" book put out in Germany by Norbert "Nobbi" Obermanns, originally in January 1981.

l. **The Frank Zappa Guitar Book**, Munchkin Music, Los Angeles, 1982, distributed by Hal Leonard Publishing Corporation, Milwaukee. ISBN 0-7935-2434-2.

m. Spelling uncertain: "mond" or "monde". The original article spelled "mond", but was based on audio tapes only.

n. To be precise, in Tarzan lore, "kreeg-ah bundolo" is supposed to be **ape language** for "Danger! Kill!" (according to the current level of research in the internet Zappa community). (There is, however, also a rumour that Tarzan used the words "kreegah bondola" in an old comic strip, "to call the elephants".) Spelling variants include "Kreega", "Creega", "Kreegah", "Bondolo" and "Bondola" – the original article spelled "Creega Bondolo", but was based on audio tapes only.

o. This was eventually released, as a bonus track on the **Läther** CD in September 1996, as "**Revenge** of the Knick-Knack People".

p. Frank Zappa: **Them Or Us** [the book], Barfko-Swill, Los Angeles, 1984 (no ISBN).

q. **QUEEN OF BLOOD** – a Filmgroup/AIP production, 1966, directed by Curtis Harrington (with the slogan "HIDEOUS BEYOND BELIEF with an INHUMAN CRAVING"). The Zappa bootleg **Beyond the Fringe of Audience Participation**, record three in the **Mystery Box**, contains a song called "Space Boy", which the liner notes describe as "the rarest track in this entire box. It was recorded for the Curtis Harrington film **QUEEN OF BLOOD**. Words, music and vocals by Florence Marley. Orchestration and additional instruments by FZ. Sound effects by Ackerman & Cole."

r. There was no "Times Beach" on the eventual 1994 **Civilization Phaze III** release, but the Ensemble Modern played parts of it ("Times Beach II" and "Times Beach III"), which were released on the **Yellow Shark** CD in 1993, along with "None of the Above" and a string-quintet revision of one of the "None of the Above" movements, called "III Revised".

s. Capitol Records may have released this early version of **Lumpy Gravy**, on 8-track tape only – it's supposed to be the world's rarest Zappa item (even if it was released, do any copies still exist?), and to contain, of course, only orchestral music.

t. Technically, the apostrophe is used to denote that something has been **omitted**: for example in "can't", the O of the word "not" has been omitted; in "goin'", it is the final G. Matters of ownership is only one instance where the apostrophe will come into play: "ladies' room", for example, is about ownership, and has an apostrophe (basically because earlier in the history of the English language, something else was used to denote ownership, which has since come to be omitted, and the apostrophe has stayed). (In this HTML version, the apostrophe looks the same as the inch sign and the single quotation mark)

u. Here is the picture:

v. On June 24 1991, Zappa played with Kocáb's band Pražský Vběr in Prague. The recording, "Improvizace v A dur s Frankem Zappou", was released on Pražský Vběr's 1992 album **Adieu CA** (AP 0001-2311).

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- Heinlein, Robert A: **Expanded Universe**, Ace Books, February 1981 (ISBN 0686598229)
- Zappa, Frank: **Them Or Us** [the book], Barfko-Swill, Los Angeles, 1984 (no ISBN)
- Zappa, Frank, with Peter Occhiogrosso: **The Real Frank Zappa Book**, Picador Pan Books, London, 1990 (ISBN 0-330-31625-7)
- **The Frank Zappa Guitar Book**, Munchkin Music, Los Angeles, 1982, distributed by Hal Leonard Publishing Corporation, Milwaukee (ISBN 0-7935-2434-2)
- Mystére des Voix Bulgares, Le**: Le Mystére des Voix Bulgares, Volumes I & II,** Elektra/Nonesuch 79165 & 79201, October 30 1987 & November 14 1988, respectively
- Pražský Výběr: **Adieu CA** (AP 0001-2311, Czech Republic 1992)
- **DADDY'S DYIN' ... WHO'S GOT THE WILL?** - an artist Circle Entertainment & Propaganda Films production, 1990, directed by Jack Fisk.
- **QUEEN OF BLOOD** – a Filmgroup/AIP production, 1966, directed by Curtis Harrington (with the slogan "HIDEOUS BEYOND BELIEF with an INHUMAN CRAVING")
- **VIDEO FROM HELL**, Honker Home Video/MPI #MP 4001, 1987

This page here is prepared by Dave Wilcher. Thank you, Dave! I (Avo Raup) corrected only some typos, links and added following footnotes:

a1. Stass = Stas Namin. Famous Russian musician, impresario and photographer (www.stasnamin.ru). He's Stas Namin Centre (SNC) issued in '80s some Frank Zappa vinyl albums. As example I have **The Man From Utopia** from SNC.

a2. Dwell page.

They're Doing the Interview of the Century – Part 3

By Den Simms, Eric Buxton, Rob Samler

Society Pages (US) #3, September 1990

OK, BOYS AND GIRLS. THIS IS THE THIRD AND FINAL PART OF OUR DECEMBER 22. 1989 INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR ZAPPA. WE SPENT FOUR AND A HALF HOURS CHATTING WITH UNCLE FRANK IN HIS BASEMENT LISTENING ROOM ON A WIDE SPECTRUM OF TOPICS. AND THE RESULT WAS ENTERTAINING, ENLIGHTENING, AND FUNNY AS HELL. WE HOPE YOU HAVE ENJOYED IT ...

DS: The world's getting smaller all the time, isn't it?

FZ: Yeah, well, in some parts of America, the world is too small already. How about Pennsylvania, with this new law they just passed?

DS: That was the abortion law.

FZ: No, they got another one about phonograph records.

DS: No, I don't know about that.

FZ: Yeah. I Just did an interview with the LA. Times about it, just before you came in here. I'm not sure that it's gone all the way through the legislature yet, but so far, it looks like it's gonna pass. What it states is this: All records must be rated, and the rating must have been applied by the manufacturer – it's not like the record store can stick their own label on it – or they can't stock it. If a person stocks an unrated record, they can be criminally prosecuted, and so can the distributor.

DS: I don't see how that could stand up [in court].

FZ: The fact is, the way they work this legislation is, they'll pass a bad law, and it will be the scourge of the area until there's a test case. Now, who's gonna be the test case ...

DS: Who wants to be the guinea pig?

FZ: Who's gonna take it to the Supreme Court?

DS: Yeah. What a hassle.

FZ: Once that's on the books there, I understand that there are attempts to pass the same kind of legislation in other states, so each state law is going to have to be challenged at the Supreme Court level.

DS: What happened with Henry Cisneros (mayor of San Antonio Texas), and all that?

FZ: Henry Cisneros had a little embarrassing situation to his political career down there. Didn't he wind up having a girlfriend, or something, and have some political problems about a year ago? Yeah, I don't know what happened to his career.

DS: But the health ordinance that he was ...

FZ: That's on the books, as far as I can tell.

DS: So, I mean, down there, they can tell you that ...

FZ: It's unhealthful to go to rock [concerts]. [1]

DS: Right. Until you're some certain age, or something.

FZ: I'm waiting for the people in this country to get smart enough to go out into the street to protest about what their governments are doing, y'know.

DS: Yeah, sure. Well, it gets discouraging sometimes, doesn't it?

FZ: Yeah, it does, but you can see how, laying in bed in the middle of the night, looking at CNN, and this report comes in that [Nicolae] Ceauşescu, who is really a total asshole, just got dumped out, I mean, oh, man, they really don't ...

DS: He's a fugitive right now, isn't he?

FZ: Yeah. They don't know where he is. They think, maybe, China. He could be in North Korea. He could be in Iran. He could still be in Romania [2], but they just found the shallow grave of about forty-five hundred protesters, that were killed in that other, uh ... Timişoara, whatever ...

DS: Yeah, yeah.

FZ: ... where they had the protest earlier in the week. He just told the army to gun these people down.

DS: Y'know what I find kinda curious, is that China got so much coverage when that happened, but Romania was just sort of like, (said with nonchalance) "Yes, and two thousand people were supposedly killed", and there wasn't that much hoopla about it. I mean, I just wonder whether or not It's just that tendency for us to see something magnanimous on the news, and then you see it get repeated again, even though it's equally as heinous, or important, or whatever, and it's not that big a deal the second time around, whether it was that, or it doesn't matter what the reasons were.

FZ: No, I think that the news is managed in the United States just as it's managed in every other country. The people who control everything want to make sure that you have one focus, and the focus is PANAMA right now.

DS: Of course.

FZ: Unless you're watching CNN, and the focus is two things. It's Panama, and cold weather. (laughter) That's what you get, so, you have to learn to read between the lines.

DS: Right. OK. Let's go back to music. I've said that a few times tonight. What can you tell us about these exotic items: 'Remington Electric Razor', with Linda Ronstadt?

FZ: In 1967, we were living in New York, and I got a request from an advertising agency. See, I did one commercial in '67 for Luden's Cough Drops, and that got an award. It got a CLIO for the best music in a commercial in '67. Then I got this request from Remington. They were looking for some kind of a 'new sound' for their commercials. (laughter) So, Linda Ronstadt happened to be managed by Herb Cohen, who was our manager at the time, and they supplied me with this advertising copy, and they wanted music for it. So, Ian Underwood and I put together this track, and Linda did the vocal on top of it, and we made a demo. They paid a thousand dollars for the demo, and that was the last I ever heard from 'em. They didn't like what I did.

DS: Needless to say, they balked on doing anything with it in terms of actually, y'know, using it on the radio, or something like that.

FZ: They never did it. No. It was a funny commercial, though.

DS: Yeah.

EB: Do you have the CLIO?

FZ: No.

EB: Was it presented to you?

FZ: No, I found out about it after the fact. I mean, they don't invite me to CLIO ceremonies, but the advertising agency that did it, y'know, they told me that it got a CLIO.

DS: What can you tell us about the [Mt.] Saint Mary's College [in Claremont, California] performance of tapes and stuff that you did?

FZ: Well, I can tell you that it was the first time that I was forced to spend my own money to hear my music performed. That concert cost me three hundred dollars. Three hundred 1962 dollars, which was a lot of money then.

DS: Yeah.

FZ: The event was recorded by KPFK [Los Angeles]. I think they've run [the tape] few times.

DS: How many people attended that?

FZ: Maybe ... two hundred.

DS: It was, like, a college type thing.

FZ: Yeah, it was a small college auditorium thing.

DS: D'you have any remembrances of what their reaction to it was?

FZ: A combination of amusement and bafflement, (laughter) which was totally appropriate.

DS: Right. I've heard a recording of 'Sad Jane', for two pianos. I believe it was something that was done over Dutch radio. (To Rob) I think that's where it's from.

RS: Um-hm.

FZ: Really?

DS: Yeah, and it was really pretty. Really a nice job on it. I was quite impressed, and I just wondered if you knew anything about it, or had any idea what it was about, or anything.

FZ: Well, let me just say this, that they never applied for a license to perform it, and they never paid me for performing it or recording it.

DS: (to Eric and Rob) Speaking of performance licenses, what was the question from the guys in Belgium?

EB: In Brussels. Do you remember when I came over [last May]. before I was headed over there, and you said. "It was a surprise to me, because they never applied for any rights or anything.?" Did you get paid yet for that. do you know, for the performance in Brussels? [3] They say, adamantly, that they paid all the proper people over there, and it might just be a ...

FZ: Well. I don't know who they paid over there, but none of it ever came to me.

DS: (to Rob) Read the question as it's stated, can you?

RS: "Have you received your performance rights from Brussels. May, '89? They were paid."

FZ: No. In fact, I was not notified that there was even a performance, and we received nothing.

DS: You've confused some of your listeners with another thing, which is a medley, which you called 'Farther O'Blivion', which would usually be done in concerts in which you were also doing a song called 'Father O'Blivion. So, there's been lots of people, who aren't really listening real closely, that get them mixed up. What was the reason for the title of 'Farther O'Blivion'?

FZ: Well. 'Father O'Blivion' is a character in ...

DS: Right ...

FZ: ... 'Don't Eat The Yellow Snow'.

DS: ... 'Don't Eat The Yellow Snow'. How 'bout 'Farther O'Blivion', the medley?

FZ: That was originally done with the '72 Petite Wazoo band, and part of that medley turned into the song 'Cucamonga', on 'Bongo Fury', and the other part turned into 'Be-Bop Tango'.

DS: There's a beginning part to it which was part of 'Greggery Peccary', which I tend to think of as the 'steno pool' section.

FZ: It is.

DS: What was the relationship between that medley and 'Father O'Blivion', the reason for the similarity of those two titles?

FZ: None whatsoever.

DS: None?

FZ: No, It's ... all these are arbitrary decisions that you make, because if you write a piece of music, how is it finally going to be deployed on a record? Sometimes the way the thing is originally conceived, the idea mutates, and you do something else with it, but you gotta call it something, otherwise you can't tell the guys in the band, "Get out the music for ... you remember that one that has the ..." (laughter) You gotta give it a name.

DS: Right. The reason why I ask questions like that is because, y'know, quite often ...

FZ: People wanna know.

DS: ... there's some arcane reason for this. The example that makes me laugh so much is a recent interview in which you gave the reason for the title of the song 'Damp Ankles' [4], which is hilariously funny.

FZ: It's true!

DS: Yeah. So, quite often there's reasons like that, but on the other hand, quite often there's no reason in particular. So, it's nice for somebody that wants to try to put things in historical perspective to be able to weed through these things. So, I hope you're bearing with me on some of this stuff.

FZ: Naw, it doesn't bother me. I think 'Damp Ankles' would make a great ballet.

EB: What did you get for your birthday?

FZ: Well, Gail gave me a very beautiful black overcoat, and a new black suit, and Dweezil got me ...

(Gail enters the room)

DS: Speaking of which ...

FZ: Hi, Doll!

GZ: Hi. I didn't know you had ...

DS: Hi, there.

GZ: Did you meet the little ...

FZ: Oh, it's so cute!

GZ: ... the little princess?

FZ: Yes ... Breezer. [5] (laughter)

GZ: Oh, Breezer. Did she ...?

FZ: She breezed us. (laughter) Yeah.

GZ: Oh, God. Well, you've been breezed.

FZ: Yes.

GZ: It happened twice in the car.

FZ: It's SO adorable.

GZ: Do you know what it's like with a car full of teenage guys ...

FZ: And a Breezer..

GZ: ... and a small dog, and it's like, all of the windows suddenly open, and heads went flying. It was scary.

FZ: Everybody making sort of gakking noises?

GZ: Oh! Frightening. But, did you hear the story about the dog running ... uh, they opened a door, or something, inside the shop, and the dog ran out and into the beverage center ...

FZ: No.

GZ: ... and it found Jay.

FZ: Well, of course, it did.

GZ: (laughs) It was so extraordinary! There's a guy looking out of the store, and saying "Where's the dog?", and Jay's sayin', "It's out here." He's going, "Hey! Here's the dog.", 'cause Ahmet had it. He was playing with it, and the girl says, "Oh, he's kidding.", and I said, "I don't think so." (laughs) It was so funny. They didn't have a dog to deliver.

FZ: I'm glad you got it.

GZ: She's very cute.

FZ: It's such a pretty dog.

GZ: So, what are you guys doing?

DS: We're doin' an interview.

FZ: Yeah. They're doing the interview of the century, and, of course, if you'll notice, Eric Buxton has performed a miracle in the corner there. [6]

GZ: I noticed that, and that's so wonderful, because y'know what? I was going to replace that tree deftly, without telling anyone.

FZ: With empty space?

GZ: No, no. I was gonna get another (laughs) tree.

EB: Another one, and let's start the whole cycle over again. (laughter)

GZ: I was going to get another tree tomorrow, fix it all up, so you could have your Christmas tree.

FZ: No, I wouldn't notice. At least it's fulfilled its destiny, and y'know, what better way, than at the hands of Eric Buxton.

EB: I mean, it's not a bad job.

FZ: I think it's a great job.

DS: You did quite well, Eric.

GZ: Did you guys bring some ... oh, yeah. You have ornaments and stuff.

FZ: Yeah. They walked in with a bag of lights and some ornaments, and ...

GZ: Really?

FZ: No. (laughter)

GZ: So, the little dog has a little cage.

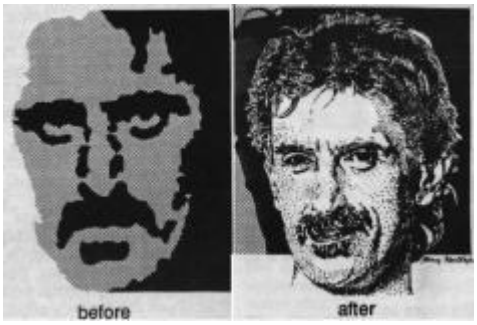
FZ: Yeah? Well, how's Dogess like it?

GZ: Oh, Dogess seemed to like it immediately.

FZ: What about Fighty-Bitey batting it around?

GZ: Fighty-Bitey is all fluffed up and ready.

(At this point, Eric hands one of the first SOCIETY PAGES advertising flyers to Gail for her to look at)



GZ: What a scary [picture] of you that is.

DS: That's what I thought.

EB: We were thinking of replacing that, maybe with the cover of 'Broadway The Hard Way'.

DS: Yeah, the facial expression that you have on the picture from 'Broadway The Hard Way' is one of my favorite pictures of you, 'cause to me, it makes you look like the Frank Zappa that I think of you as, which is a nice guy, with kind of a nice smile, and looking sort of bemused, y'know. That particular photo [from the flyer] kind of looks sinister.

FZ: That particular photo looks like it would be more ideal for the Czechoslovakian branch of the fan club.

ALL: (laughter)

EB: Well, then I guess it's unanimous. We'll change the photo.

DS: So, that's going to be replaced.

EB: Luckily we didn't mail too many of them.

DS: OK. Here's another question. What is the Booger Bear? What is the significance of Marty Perellis, the dog, and the two Booger Bears? Who is Rashid, and what is Do-Do room service? [7]

FZ: OK. Well, that's a lot of questions.

DS: They kind of all go together.

FZ: A Booger Bear is an extremely ugly anything, and a Booger is short for Booger Bear, in the parlance of that '73 band. Perellis was our road manager, and there was an occasion where he met some girl, I think it was in Memphis, who had a great Dane.

Apparently, this girl, uh, liked to do things in conjunction with the great Dane, and Marty brought the girl and the dog to his room, and that's how that ...

DS: That's the legend of that. Yeah. How about Rashid?

FZ: Rashid is George Duke's son, right?

GZ: Yeah, that's the only significance that I know of. I like that, you're asking this. It's your interview.

FZ: I just wanted to check. I thought that that's what ...

EB: We want to set up an interview with you later on, early next year, maybe.

GZ: All right, maybe. If you change the picture.

EB: (laughs) OK.

GZ: (laughs) Or at least fix the nose.

EB: And we'll send you a copy of our mailing list as soon as we get it organized. Trade you your list for ours.

GZ: I don't think so.

EB: (laughs) I know, but Jim mentioned that you'd like it, and we'd be glad to give it to you.

GZ: Oh, yeah.

DS: Lastly, Do-Do room service.

FZ: The room service routine is something that we used to do in 'Pygmy Twylyte'.

DS: Does it just stem from adventures that you had while on the road, concerning room service?

FZ: Yeah, the whole idea of Do-Do room service is something that Napoleon came up with, and I don't know where that stems from.

GZ: Dogs, probably.

FZ: That's probably what it was, yeah. Oh, I could tell ya another story that ... I don't know whether that's where that actually came from, but it shoulda been. (laughter) Perellis had another girlfriend, that he met in Ohio, who had a cockapoo.

DS: It's one of those dogs that you can't tell which end is the front, right? Yeah.

FZ: Well, I believe we were in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and the girl, the cockapoo, and Perellis were in a Holiday Inn, and, uh, it was discovered that the cockapoo had worms, and this was Sunday. So, in an emergency effort, he wanted to do something about the dog's worms, and called a veterinarian. I don't know how he managed to do all this, but the net result was, they recommended that they give the dog a Fleet enema ... in the bathtub.

DS: A what enema?

FZ: Fleet. It's one of those prepackaged chemical enemas that you buy at the store. By the way, Fleet enemas are manufactured in Lynchburg, Virginia. (laughter)

DS: I saw that show. [8] That was pretty funny ...

FZ: So, they wound up (laughs) filling this bathtub with dog do-do and worms, (much laughter) in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

ALL: (laughter)

FZ: Marty and his folklore was often directly connected to dogs.

RS: Do you think you'll have any tapes to put any further adventures of Marty and the dogs out in the future? Yeah. You did some of that on a videotape, I guess, with 'Dub Room [Special]', right?

FZ: The further adventures of Marty and the dogs?

RS: Yeah, and the Booger Bears.

DS: Well, the Do-Do Room Service, I think, is what I'm thinkin' of, on video ... on 'Dub Room'.

FZ: Yeah, it's on The Dub Room Special', but, um ... there's a sequel to that thing that was recorded in New Jersey! [9]

RS: Right. The 'Ruthie, Ruthie' ...

FZ: Yeah, that whole medley, there. That went on for two shows, and there was a follow-up there, a conclusion of the Booger Bear story, that's coming out on another one of the ['You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore' volumes].

RS: Yeah, 'cause it seems like a lot of those '74 shows, in the introduction to 'Dupree's Paradise', George Duke would ...

FZ: Do a lot of stuff.

RS: ... go on with that. Some really funny stuff.

DS: Did Tom Waits ever appear on stage. or were the references to that, that I've heard on a couple of tapes, just joking references?

FZ: He used to be our opening act, 'cause he used to be managed by Herb Cohen.

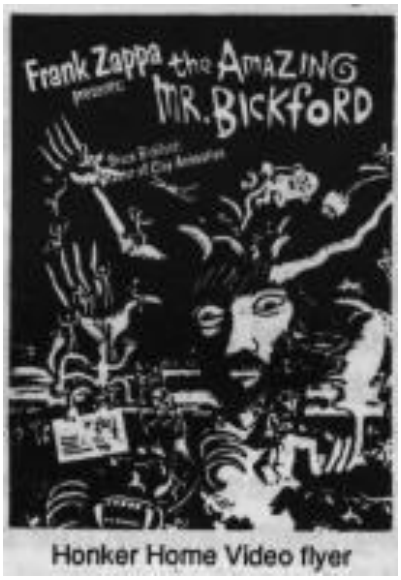
DS: Ahh. I see. OK. During 'Broken Hearts Are For Assholes', that dialogue section that comes in the center ...

FZ: Um-hm.

DS: ... there's a reference to somebody named Buddy Love. Who is Buddy Love?

FZ: Buddy Love is the character that Jerry Lewis played in that ... scientist movie.

(Gail returns with a new Honker Home Video promotional flyer)



Honker Home Video flyer

GZ: These are hot off the presses.

RS: Oh, thanks.

DS: Thank you. Oh, great!

GZ: For you fetishists.

FZ: Oh, thank you.

DS: Yeah, everybody's anxious to see this.

FZ: Nice Job!

GZ: Um-hm. Do you want a coffee, or something?

FZ: I was gonna say, I just made a pot of coffee in there, and since I've got this thing pinned on me, could you bring me a cup?

GZ: Yes.

DS: Yeah, again, you're being exceedingly gracious with giving us, not only your time, but giving us this BIG HUNK of your time here, and ...

FZ: Hey, if you want to do something, do it right.

DS: ... yeah. Good. We're really grateful for it.

FZ: All right. Buddy Love, the nutty professor. Isn't that the character that Jerry Lewis turns into when he drinks the potion? (laughter)

DS: Yeah, I've seen that.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: Maybe, like, with the two buck teeth?

FZ: Yeah, yeah. Patrick O'Hearn is the one responsible for all the Buddy Love stuff.

DS: Right. I recognized his voice as being the one saying that. How about the involvement with Lisa Popeil? How did that come about?

FZ: She auditioned for the band one day when we were trying out drummers (To Gail) Thank you very much [for the coffee].

GZ: See ya.

FZ: OK. Gimme a kiss.

GZ: Ummm

FZ & GZ: (SMACK!)

GZ: Thanks for doing the tree.

EB: You're welcome.

FZ: Lisa had, at the time, a boyfriend, who was a drummer. We were having an open call for drummers. This was when we were auditioning, when Chad got the job. So, when her boyfriend showed up to audition for the job, Tommy got into a conversation with her, and came over to me, and told me, "This girl says she can play the piano, and sing, and sight read, and all this stuff. Why don't you try her out?" I said, "OK. I will." Her boyfriend didn't get the drummer job, but she could play. She could sight sing. I handed her the music for 'Be-Bop Tango'. She sight sang it!

DS: Wow!

FZ: And, y'know, she's a skilled musician. So, I said, "I'll consider putting a girl in the band again, why not?" And so, she attended a few of the rehearsals, I guess for about a week. and there were some things that she could do, and do very well, and other things that she couldn't, and it just turned out that there were more of the things that she couldn't do, that we needed, for a second keyboard position in the band, that it, y'know, just didn't work out.

DS: That position ultimately went to Bobby Martin.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: I heard on a tape that was made from the show that you guys did, where she appeared in Santa Monica [10], and during that segment that she did her thing, where she sort of told her life story, there was some reference in there that gave me the impression that there was ... some reference to Scott that gave me an impression that there was ... something

FZ: Some hanky and panky going on?

DS: Some hanky and panky in there.

FZ: I think you better talk to Scott about that.

DS: Talk to Scott on that, huh? (laughs) All right.

FZ: It's called unverified hanky panky.

DS: Sure.

RS: Did you hear something that Scott got married recently?

FZ: Yes he did, and he has a very lovely wife. She's German, and she was over here just the other day. Her name is Ute [11], and she's great.

RS: That's good.

DS: Congratulations, Scott [and Ute]. Tell us about something that happened with Smothers putting cheese in Arthur's suitcase.

FZ: Well. Arthur and Smothers didn't get along, and, uh there's this legendary cheese that we experience when we go to Denmark. It's some of the worst smelling stuff on the planet, that you will often find laid out for breakfast at the Palace Hotel in Copenhagen, and it's lethal stuff. (laughter) I can't remember exactly what Arthur did that pissed John off. I can't remember what it was, but the revenge was John threatened to get a quantity of this cheese, and since John often was working with the bag boy to coordinate the luggage, he was gonna slip some of this cheese in on top of Arthur's clothes for the trip back to the United States, therefore rendering them radioactive by the time they arrived.

ALL: (much laughter)

DS: Did Smothers have much of a tendency for practical joking and such, while on the road?

FZ: Ahh, yes. He was a practical joker, that's for sure. I've even got some videotape of Smothers doing practical jokes.

DS: How did your association with Smothers come about? Was he just somebody that you hired?

FZ: Perellis know Smothers from Baltimore. Perellis is also from Baltimore. When I first started carrying a bodyguard, I had tried out two ... let's see ... no, I had three bodyguards before Smothers. The first one was a guy named Newmar, who lost the job because on one occasion, he took a fan, who'd tried to jump onstage, I mean, some menial little transgression, and took him out in back of the place, and beat him up, (laughter) and, y'know, I thought, "This is totally uncalled for."

DS: That's overkill.

FZ: Yeah, way-overkill. So, he got fired. Newmar was an off duty LAPD, and then, the next guy was another LAPD, except he was a Jehovah's Witness ...

DS: Oh ... (chuckles)

FZ: ... and when you have to spend a lot of time with these guys ... and I couldn't handle that guy y'know. He didn't last long.

DS: I'm surprised that it's not that he couldn't handle you, y'know. I mean, y'know, you understand why I'm saying that ...

FZ: Well. I mean, y'know, he just had to grin and bear it.

DS: The Jehovah's Witnesses that I've met have been so devoted. I mean, they are a pretty devoted bunch, to their religion, and, uh, I'm surprised that somebody that would be that devoted would be willing to have that sort of a job for a paycheck. That kind of surprises me.

FZ: (chuckle) A buck's a buck.

DS: A buck's a buck.

FZ: Then, another guy, who was really a great bodyguard, and I wish I could remember his name, he was only with me for a short time, but he used to sing in a rhythm 'n blues group called "The Calvanes", on Dootone, and he recorded a song called "Florabelle", which I have in my collection. His name is Bob. I can't remember his last name. Bob was a good guy. We used to sit in the dressing room, and sing doo-wop tunes together, but he wasn't available anymore, and couldn't do it anymore. [24] And then, I got another guy named ... John, who was the brother ... of a girl that I went to high school with in Lancaster ...

DS: These must've been have been all through the early seventies.

FZ: Yeah, and he contributed a little folklore. He was the one who came up with 'swimp', and, uh ...

DS: With what?

FZ: 'Swimp'.

DS: Can you explain that?

FZ: Well, there is a language called Gullah. D'ya know what that is?

DS: Never heard of it.

FZ: Gullah is that black dialect, that Negro dialect that is repeated most constantly. It comes from this language called Gullah. They have different words for different things, and different pronunciations and 'swimp' is 'shrimp'. They call 'em 'swimp'. His language was very Gullah, and so, I was introduced into the concept of 'swimp'. The other thing that guy was famous for was he liked to fuck Holiday Inn maids with hairy legs.

ALL: (laughter)

FZ: And, the idea that, uh ... y'know, to imagine this guy in the morning, when the maid knocks on your door, and you have to get up too early, and he would be dragging one of these women into the room, and, y'know, strapping her on before he got on the bus, and telling everybody how hairy her legs were, scratching his back, and all this weird shit. (laughter) Quite a guy. Then, along came Smothers. At first, at the beginning of the tour, he thought I was crazy. He tried to go home. He tried to get out of the job. But, he stayed with me for ten or eleven years. [12]

DS: So, speaking of Smothers, what is 'the Falcum'?

John Smothers

FZ: Well, that also goes back to Copenhagen. Now, John also has a mysterious command of the English language ...

DS: Sure.

FZ: ... as we all know. Once upon a time, on his first trip to Copenhagen, we were playing at a place called the Falkoner Center ...

DS: Sure.

FZ: ... and we didn't have a limousine. I had to take a cab to the place. We get in the car. It's just this little tiny car, (laughter) not a Fiat, but maybe, slightly larger than a Fiat. You know how big John is ...

DS: Sure.

FZ: ... and it's a cab, and the driver is Danish, and he doesn't speak English. I get in the back, and John gets in the front, and the cab driver is just sittin' there, 'cause he doesn't know where to go, and John finally realizes that he must tell the driver where to go, so, he

just turns to him, and goes, "FALCUM." (laughter), and the guy looks at him, y'know, kinda lookin' up like this, and John goes, "FALCUM."

ALL: (laughter)

FZ: ... and the guy DOESN'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON. And then, John gets vehement. He goes, "TAKE ME TO THE FALCUM!"

ALL: (laughter)

FZ: And the driver jumped out of the car

ALL: (hysterical laughter)

FZ: ... and ran into the lobby of the hotel to ask the guy in Danish at the desk (laughs) what the fuck is going on.

ALL: (much laughter)

DS: That's a good story.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: I imagine John provided you guys with lots of entertaining anecdotes over the years. He's a unique individual.

FZ: Oh, yeah. One of my favorites was on the last tour [13] that he did with us. We were driving in, I guess it was in Germany, in the middle of the night. coming back from the gig, and we're passing a corrugated aluminum building, and he hasn't been talking much, 'cause I found out after the tour that he was very ill. He had, uh, diabetes, and he had a bleeding ulcer. At the end of the tour, he went into the hospital, and y'know, had to have his ulcer taken care of, and he never said anything about it during the tour. So, here we are, driving along. Everybody's quiet, and he sees this corrugated aluminum building. Now, if you were in a car, you probably wouldn't even pay any attention to a regular old corrugated aluminum building. John looks at it, and goes, "LUMIUM ADELOIDS!"

ALL: (laughter)

FZ: (laughs) You figure it out! (laughter) LUMIUM ADELOIDS.

DS: (laughs) That's pretty funny. Oh, my.

RS: What about the project for Lyon, France, and the orchestra?

FZ: That's this June or July. [14] They're gonna do it. They've got the scores.

RS: Are you gonna be there for it?

FZ: Yes, I'm supposed to go there to produce the recording, 'cause they're going to record 'Sinister Footwear'.

RS: Hmm. Great.

EB: Is there gonna be a public performance of it?

FZ: Yep, and the ballet will choreograph it, and then, the tapes will be used for this ballet company to tour with it. They'll dance to the tape.

EB: Let's hope we can all attend the opening.

FZ: In France?

EB: Sure.

FZ: (chuckles) All right! (laughter) Well ...

EB: [Rob and I] just flew here ...

FZ: Yeah, I know ...

DS: It's easier for these guys on the east coast. I live up near San Francisco, so it's a little harder for me to get all the way across to do that. OK. During performances of the 'Torture Never Stops', 'Pick Me, I'm Clean', and other songs, I guess in the late seventies[15], you would, quite often, do a solo with erotic female sounds coming from the P.A. Perhaps you can settle a long-time rumor. Who's that voice?

FZ: I can't tell you.

DS: All right.

FZ: Let's just call 'em field recordings.

EB: Should've played a tape of Denise.

FZ: Of who?

EB: Denise.

DS: This woman friend of mine, who's putting us up while we're here in L.A. This lady has this sound that she makes at Grateful Dead concerts, which is ... when you were doin' the tour in '88, at the time that I was thinkin' of the tour and when it would get to the west coast, I really badly wanted to introduce this lady to you, and unbeknownst to her, say, "Denise. You gotta do your sound for Frank. He's gotta hear this.", and I would even imagine you, y'know. makin' a ...

FZ: A sample of it?

DS: ... sample of it, 'cause the sound that she makes is so unique. I would describe it as a female Tarzan at the moment of climax.

FZ: (laughs loudly) And she does this for the Grateful Dead?

DS: She does it when she goes to Dead shows, when they're comin' out for a set, and there's this kind of lull after the crowd has cheered

FZ: And the blue smoke is about here? (laughter)

DS: Right, and they're just about ready to start playing. If you know, at Grateful Dead shows, they allow people to tape their shows.

FZ: Um-hm.

DS: So, there's this thing called the 'taping section'. When we go see the Grateful Dead, we sit in an area of the seating which is always kinda near where the people tape. We have a tendency to wanna sit in a place in the hall where it's gonna sound good, so we have a tendency to be near those people with their microphones. At that point, she always let's out with her (Den lamely attempts to imitate Denise), and does this sound, and like, forty of these microphone beladened Deadhead tapers will all turn simultaneously, and look at her, and go, "G-R-R-R-R!" (laughs) It's just a thing that's happened ever the years that's pretty funny.

FZ: Um-hm. I'm sure I'll hear it one day.

RS: In the future, would you ever consider allowing the taping section at your concerts?

FZ: Probably not. Probably not, because I think that the privileged would be abused.

RS: Yeah, but you realize that there's no way to stop it anyway, right?

FZ: Well, we've done everything that we could in (laughs) the past.

RS: Well, even metal detectors don't stop people from gettin' tape recorders in.

FZ: Well, one real way to stop it is to not play live. That stops it, y'know.

DS: Obviously. Well, the thing that has allowed the them to have some success, and have that work out, for Grateful Dead, as an example, is the fact that they tour constantly, and it's part of the scene that goes along with their whole deal, and in the long run, with them, because they are a constantly touring entity, and because over the years, there's been recording after recording after recording made by dozens of these people in the audience, the one thing that has done really good for them, in an economic way, is. It has put bootleg albums of the Grateful Dead into the realm of the past. There's no reason for them to exist, because somebody can always pick up a cassette somewhere. That's the one real positive aspect that they've gotten out of it. I've thought about that, in terms of you.

FZ: Um-hm.

DS: The one thing that you have in common with that band is the fact that there's a lot of improvisation that goes on. No show is the same. But the one limiting aspect to it is how much touring happens.

FZ: Yeah. Well, the other thing is how much they do overseas, or how much, uh I think that ... the real answer is ... I wouldn't consider it.

DS: OK. Here's something completely unrelated to that. Is Oliver North the modern day Agency Man?

FZ: No. Agency Man is about advertising agencies selling political candidates, and Oliver North is not that character.

DS: OK. I have to plead guilty to not listening closely. I'd always thought that Agency Man had something to do with the Central Intelligence Agency.

AGENCY MAN

Sell us a president, Agency Man
Smiling big brothers and fathers perhaps
Sell us a president, Agency Man
A gay smiling nothing we know never craps
(One, two, three, four)
(Ba-bum-bum, ba-bum-bum, ba-bum-bum, ba-bum-bum-bum-bum
Bum-bum, ba-bum-bum, ba-bum-bum, ba-bum-bum-bum-bum, etc.)
When he's closed the schools and burned the books the way we planned,
We'll get the press together with the Barry Sadler Band
(La-la-la-la, la-la-la-la-la, etc.)
With lots to drink from nine o'clock they'll all be bombed by ten
We'll reveal he's bound for Washington and sell him once again
(Rumppely-pump-pump-pump, rump-pump-pump-pump, etc.)
We'll sell him in the movie's, on the tube throughout the year
We'll sell him by the buckets to the Okies drinking beer
We'll teach him how to walk and talk, we'll putty up his chin
We'll print his picture everywhere, of course the shmuck will win
People are a lot of pigs, they're greedy and they're dumb
I'm sure that's just a simple truth, look how far he's come
From the heart of old Death Valley to the ruling of our land
A simple trick, you simple pigs, just the way we planned

FZ: Well that's another meaning for it, but the original ... the song was written because at a certain point in American political history, politicians discovered Madison Avenue, and it changed the face of American politics. Because the Republicans always had more money that the Democrats, they were the first to hire a real Madison Avenue agency. I believe it was BBD&O, Batten, Barton, Durston, and Osborne, (laughter) that took on the Republican campaign. I think it was for the Nixon campaign. The amount of money they started to spend on the campaign became science fiction.

DS: Sure.

FZ: That was the beginning of what we have now.

DS: Yeah. Nixon's campaign machine really pioneered what we have today.

FZ: Yeah. What we have today, and how 'terrific' it is.

DS: Right.

FZ: So, that's where it came from, the idea that instead of dealing with the issues, you're just dealing with the candidate as a product "Sell us a president. Agency Man."

DS: I've seen some photos taken from some sort of a photo session ... I'll state the question over again. I saw some photos, I believe, in High Times, from a photo session which there's a bunch of potted plants and you, clad in, like, leopard skin underwear with topless harem girls, and all that.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: What was that photo session about?

FZ: That was done in Amsterdam in the early seventies. It was just a stupid photo session.

DS: Right. Pretty funny photos.

FZ: Yeah. Most of the girls were probably from the places with the little windows ...

ALL: (laughter)

EB: The picture of Baby Snakes, with the girl with the tongue. Is that just a model, or is that someones ...

from a photo session in Amsterdam

promo photo for Baby Snakes

FZ: That was the make-up girl.

EB: That was the make-up girl.

FZ: Yeah, It was a candid shot, y'know. She Just happened to have her tongue stickin' out when she was touchin' up my make-up on the thing.

RS: Oh. and that's why she's got, like, a little white patch of make-up smudged or something?

FZ: Yeah, yeah.

DS: What ever happened to the contingency suit that was supposedly filed by several ex-Mothers?

FZ: It is going to arbitration, and It's not gonna go to court. It's gonna be arbitrated, and it's coming up very soon. [16]

DS: OK. So, that should be sometime in the future. All right.

RS: How 'bout this one? In 1988, after the show on Hamburg, did you jam in a club, or something?

FZ: Yeah.

RS: D'you remember the name of the club?

FZ: Oh ... no. I don't.

RS: My friend from Germany wanted me to ask you that.

FZ: Yeah, we did jam. We've done that a couple of times. We did practically, well, three quarters of our live show at a place in Ann Arbor, Michigan, after the concert at the [Crisler] Auditorium there one night. We went to this fabulous club, and just went in there, and ... it was the band with Napoleon and Bozzio. We went in there, and just did our show.

RS: Wow! Never heard about that one.

FZ: That'd be a great bootleg tape, wouldn't it?

DS: That'd be a great one. Um ... have you tried doing any serial music with the Synclavier? It seems to me, like, with the computer technology, you could do some programming, and sort of sit back and see what the result is. Have you tried anything like that?

FZ: Oh, yeah. I've done that. Sure.

DS: And what was the result?

FZ: The result is it's serial music without most of the eyestrain and brainstrain. If you like the way serial music sounds, you know, you can do it

DS: Do you think that, uh ... well, certainly, I don't claim to be an aficionado of serial music. I'm aware of what it is, and all that, but y'know, I don't ...

FZ: There's certain serial procedures that you can use for tonal music, too, and I do that all the time, but, y'know, strictly serial music, that's not my realm.

DS: Right.

FZ: I tried that when I was in high school

DS: Strictly adhering to that recipe.

FZ: Yeah. I gave up on that, because I'm not that kind of a structured guy. I think that the important thing to remember to keep in mind is whether you'll like the piece when you listen to it, and however you got it to sound that way is irrelevant.

DS: So, your tendency is to just hear things in your head, and put it on the page, or type it out on the keyboard, or hum it to the guys in the band, and do it that way.

FZ: Yeah, and if I don't like the result of what I told them to do, then I change it, until I can tolerate it.

DS: Have you ever done a live show in which it felt to you like things were going badly, and at the time it was happening, you were not satisfied at all with the result, and then, subsequently listened to a tape recording that you'd made of it, and ...

FZ: Two or three times.

DS: ... found out that the result was something that was worthwhile?

FZ: Yes, two or three times. But usually, if I think it's going badly, I am right. The only time that I will get that kinda surprise is if you're playing in a hall where the acoustics are so bad that you literally can't tell what the fuck you're doing onstage, but sometimes, when you listen to the tape afterwards, because of the way microphones work, and the fact that in a multi-track mix you can turn off the ambience, you can hear that certain things are good. The concert in Metz, [France], is a good example of that, because the hall was terrible, but in listening to the tapes, there were two or three selections from that that I've used in albums. [17]

DS: Yeah, I always kind of wondered, because you had written about the acoustical quality of that facility in liner notes of things that you subsequently used, and I kind of wondered

what would be the circumstances that would lead to something that seemed like that bad of an environment, yet something came out of it worthwhile ...

FZ: Because you literally can't tell while you're doing it all the time. I mean, you can tell by feel, and often, everybody on the stage hears a different thing. That's just the way acoustics are ...

DS: Absolutely.

FZ: ... and if a guy's in a position where he really ... he's just going on muscle memory, he can't tell what he's playing, he can't hear what he's singing. he's depressed, because everybody in the band likes to feel like they're into it, and doing a good job, but the remarkable thing is that the way the guys in the band have been trained, they can go on muscle memory in situations like that, and finish the show, and then, we can all be surprised, after the fact, how well things will turn out when you're performing in adverse circumstances.

DS: Lemme ask you this too. During the improvisational section that'll come in a song like 'Pound For A Brown ...' or 'King Kong', one of those sections, are there any times when that pulse which is commonly thought of as being the 'one', when you're playing a solo and that pulse gets lost ...

FZ: Sure.

DS: Generally, how do you react to that? Do you get distressed by that, or do you find that to be another element of music that you can work with in some capacity, or just, what happens?

FZ: Both. I get distressed, because I know when they lose the one, that means when I give the cue to come back in to the rest of song, there's gonna be a train wreck, (laughter) and also, when they lose the one, y'know, it's a license to kill in the middle of the solo in some ways. You just do whatever the fuck you want, because everybody's out there in the zones. But, the thing you always have to be concerned about is how you're gonna end it. Where ya gonna go when its all done?

DS: That's right.

FZ: You have to keep some sort of logic to it.

DS: Have you ever worked out any kinds of procedures with bands, in which there's, more or less, a contingency for that happening?

FZ: Sure. You wait. You wait, and then, you give one big massive downbeat. It's messy, but, y'know ...

DS: It's not subtle, but it works.

FZ: That's right.

DS: OK. Here's something I've been thinkin' about for years. On 'Revised Music For Guitar And Low Budget Orchestra', on 'Studio Tan', there's a really beautiful solo that you play on that song which has always been one of my favorites, but there's a tone quality to that guitar, which sounds brassy. To my ear, It sounds like there's a trumpet, or something, accompanying it, which I assumed, given the way that the notes are being bent, and all that kinda stuff, that it couldn't be happening.

FZ: You're so very, very wrong.

DS: Tell me all about it.

FZ: Well. I played the solo. It's an Ovation gut string acoustic plugged directly into the board, and it was transcribed by Bruce Fowler, and he wrote it down, and he doubled it with four trombones ...

DS: Oh, shit!

FZ: In harmony.

DS: With all the bent notes

FZ: All the bent notes.

DS: That is somethin'. That is somethin' else. I mean, to my ear ... when I would listen to that, my ear would say, "Brass."

FZ: It is brass.

DS: "That's brass.", but my mind would say, "Brass can't do that. That's goin' beyond ..."

FZ: Brass can't, but Bruce can. (laughter)

DS: Well, that is really somethin' else. I'm amazed, and not amazed, at the same time.

FZ: That's one of the reasons why I was so pissed off at Warner Brothers, that they fucked those albums up, because I believe there's some fantastic pieces on those albums, and people shoulda had a chance to hear 'em with good quality sound, and ...

DS: Some of the versions which were part of Läther wound up being different versions, I guess, from what ...

FZ: Or different mixes.

DS: Yeah, and again, I guess this would revert back to the earlier question about Läther, as opposed to releasing those as they were. I mean, I'll just kinda make an assumption that since you originally wanted to release Läther as Läther, that you preferred those versions over the ones that Warners released.

FZ: Well, its been so long since I went through that brain process, I couldn't give ya a good answer to that, but I think that the way I prepared 'em for CD release, you'll be happy with the way they sound.

EB: Are you planning on re-releasing the EMI CD's? [18]

FZ: Yes. That's all for next year.

DS: How do you feel about this recent thing with rap musicians, and the sampling they do? I noticed that you put the little sampling specification, the little clause that you find on your albums.

FZ: Um-hm. Well, I don't appreciate it.

DS: You think it's a sleazy thing to do?

FZ: It depends on what they do with it. I mean, one group has already done it with one of my things.

DS: Really? With some of your music?

FZ: Yeah.

DS: Who's the group?

FZ: I can't remember. Somebody told me about it, but I know it's been done.

DS: I saw some little news story on MTV. or 'Showbiz Today', or one of those kinda things about this, and I was kinda surprised that, quite often, the music that they pull their

samples from is something that's in a completely, totally different realm that what you'd think that people who are doin' rap music might listen to. I'm kinda surprised about that

FZ: Yeah.

EB: We were speaking earlier tonight about taking little snatches of other music, and inserting it in your music

FZ: But. I'm not stealing a recorded performance. That's the difference, see, because I there's a copyright on the actual performance.

DS: Here's somethin' else here. It's my impression that as a teenager, that you really didn't have the means to be able to do things like have a big hot-rod, and all that, but yet. you seem well versed in hot rod lore. [19]

FZ: I'm not well versed with hot-rod lore at all, I mean, only marginally, because that was not part of my life. I didn't drive a car until I was, what ... twenty ... two? Somethin' like that. My parents wouldn't let me get a license. They were always ...

DS: I guess I've seen these little references like, um ... I don't know, just things that I tend to think of as, like, hot-rod lingo

FZ: Appletons, and stuff like that?

DS: Dingleballs, and ...

FZ: Well. y'know. If you're a teenager in southern California. ya gotta know the language.

DS: Just pickin'up that stuff up by osmosis.

FZ: Yeah.

Vinnie lights up

Terry in 1987

DS: What was the significance of Vinnie's seal calls?

FZ: That was just something that Vinnie could do. It was a noise that Vinnie could make, so why not use it?

DS: It was pretty funny.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: (laughs) He's a pretty interesting guy.

FZ: He is.

DS: He's my favorite of your drummers. It seemed to me that that particular chair in your band is, perhaps THE critical one.

FZ: True, because the style of the drummer is gonna determine the style of the band, and his personality pervades everything that goes on. If he's a wild and crazy guy, you re gonna have a wild and crazy band.

DS: Among your fans, I think still today, the drummer of yours that still keeps that status, and people think of him as the best, is probably Terry.

FZ: Yeah, because he was the most visual of all the drummers, and there's no question that he's a fabulous drummer.

DS: Yeah. The thing that I like about Terry, and I like about Vinnie, the thing I like about those two guys is not only did they have the precision, and the licks, and all of that stuff down, but they had this kind of hard to define quality, which I call 'gonzo'.

FZ: It's attitude. [20]

DS: It's attitude. It's REAL STRONG enthusiasm, or something.

FZ: Yeah. It's not just a job with these guys. It's a way of life.

DS: Well, I just saw, recently, and these guys did, too, Terry playin' with Jeff Beck.

FZ: Was he good?

DS: Yeah! He was truly amazing.

FZ: Great!

DS: Yeah. I haven't seen anybody play drums like that since seein' those guys play with you. I saw Vinnie, a few years back, playin' as part of Joni Mitchell's back-up band, and I was real curious to see how he would be in a context which is definitely gonna limit him more, in terms of ... you know how he could thrash around

FZ: Yeah.

DS: ... and he was hot.

FZ: He's always hot. He's just a fabulous drummer.

EB: Are you gonna release your versions of 'Purple Haze' and 'Sunshine Of Your Love'?

FZ: Yes, Indeed.

DS: Good. 'Sunshine ...' was taken from a rehearsal, right?

FZ: Yes. So was 'Purple Haze'. [21]

DS: We got to hear what 'Purple Haze' sounded like, but 'Sunshine ...', we haven't heard that, but Keneally tells us that it's even more bent than 'Purple Haze'.

FZ: It's pretty bent. (laughter)

DS: That's quite a statement. 'Purple Haze' was out there. Also, congratulations on your speech at the pro-choice rally. [22]

FZ: (chuckles) The prayer?

DS: Yeah, that was pretty cool. I was very surprised to hear that. It was, I thought, a good thing to do.

FZ: Yeah, I thought so, too.

DS: How many people were there?

FZ: A hundred thousand. The press reported twenty [thousand]. They tried to make it look small. It was a hundred thousand. Not my count. That was the announcement at the event. [Richard] Dreyfus was on before I was, and I think he was the one that said it. I looked out

there, and to me, it looked like a hundred thousand people, I've seen twenty thousand before, and this wasn't twenty thousand. They were all over the fuckin' place.

DS: Do you think you surprised any feminists that might've been there?

FZ: No question, but I had a lot of good reports about, y'know, people appreciated the fact that I showed up, and, uh ... Dweezil videotaped it.

DS: No shit?

FZ: I've got the whole prayer on tape, plus, you can hear people praying along with it, (laughter) and I'm thinkin' about stickin' that on an album.

DS: The tapes that I've heard of it ... I got to hear a cassette tape of it from somebody who was out in the audience with a little cassette job, and it sounds great! Particularly, there was one kinda long line in the speech that ended with "... asking for the death of a Supreme Court Justice ...", and it's really cool when ya listen to it on the tape as they repeat back, 'cause the first part of that line is jumbled up, and then, the last, about, four or five words coalesce, and they all say it right together ...

FZ: How 'bout the one that goes. "HUH!"?

DS: Right! (laughs) Y'know, and you can hear that one part of that one kind of coalesces, and they all say it together, then a little bit of laughter that kind of comes up as a result, that came from the people hearing it in that way, kind of gettin' a little laugh from it.

FZ: Well, I think they needed to have that, because the proceeding was pretty fuckin' serious, up to that point, and y'know, you do need to keep up a good fight, but you need to keep some perspective, and keep your sense of humor about this stuff, because if it's all dreadful, dreadful, dreadful, then people ...

DS: It's not much fun. It's hard to keep people ...

FZ: Yeah.

DS: ... keep people on the bus.

FZ: That's right.

DS: Yeah. That's very true.

FZ: So, the kind of character that I am, I can get up there, and get away with that. I think that somebody else doing it woulda been perceived as out of place, but I thought it was the right thing to do, and so, I did it.

DS: It worked well. Um ... certain compositions such as 'Stevie's Spanking'. seem paradoxical to me, in the respect that they seem like a parody, by nature. With 'Stevie's Spanking', certainly, when seein' you guys live, you're kinda goin' through the poses, and doin' all that kind of stuff, but at the same time, it seems like there's a note of seriousness to it, in that it's being performed righteously.

FZ: Why shouldn't you? If you're gonna do parody, you can perform a parody righteously.

DS: I mean, is that something that you initially start with an intent to do, which is to have those two seemingly opposite qualities coexist, or just that you wind up doing a song, and that's an aspect that evolves as a result of it?

FZ: Well let's face it. Heavy metal is already a parody of itself. For a band like ours to do anything that even smells like heavy metal, you're well into Parodyland the minute you count it off. (laughter)

DS: Yeah. It seems these days that to be in a heavy metal band, the most important aspect is how well you can whip your hair and forth.

FZ: That's right. (laughter)

DS: So, are we beginning to wear ya out, Frank?

FZ: Yeah. Well, can you hear my voice is going down, y'know? I don't talk this many hours non-stop during the day. Remember, I work by myself, and don't talk to myself, and, y'know ... I'll answer some more, but I'm fadin'.

DS: Let us know at any time, because at this point, you've exceeded our expectations.

FZ: All right. I'll give ya three more, and you're done.

DS: That sounds reasonable. I'll tell ya what. Why don't I even do this? (To Eric & Rob) You wanna make the questions ftom you guys, 'cause certainly I've been doin' the bulk of the question asking tonight? It's the least I can do.

EB: What else did you get for your birthday? You started to tell us. This is my kinda question

FZ: Dweezil gave me a real nice sport coat, which is purple, and kind of heavy ... fuzzy weird shaped ...

EB: I know you like those heavy, fuzzy coats ...

FZ: Well, y'know, it's a very nice coat, and he got one exactly like it for himself. I said, "What's this? Our new band uniform?" (laughter) The people at the office gave me presents. Fialka gave me this videotape of 'The Worlds Greatest Sinner'.

EB: It was video?

FZ: Yes.

DS: I wonder where he came up with that?

FZ: I don't know, but he got it. Judy gave me four cappuccino cups, and Dottie gave me three or four bags of different kinds of coffee beans. Lisa gave me a little pin that looks like a Christmas bulb, that you pin on your coat, that lights up, and blinks on and off ...

EB: It's neon?

FZ: I don't know what it is. It's this cute little thing.

EB: We tried to get you a piece of the Berlin wall, but it didn't come through. [23]

RS: Yeah. it might still happen.

FZ: I'll go there and get some, live and in person. (laughter)

RS: Just watch it, though, 'cause it might have asbestos in it.

FZ: Yeah, well, that's dangerous. I won't sniff it. And, let's see, who else gave me stuff? I got two pairs of socks from Catherine, and a long list of people that called up to say , "Happy Birthday" . I started, last night, to try and call them all back. 'cause I got their numbers. I managed to call one guy, and left a message on his phone, but I'll never get through the list ... 'cause the minute I started tryin' to make the calls, all these people came over, and ...

EB: Well, when you get up to number four and five ...

RS: Yeah. [Eric and I] were four and five, but, uh, (laughter) you can thank us in person.

FZ: OK. Thank you, thank you. (laughter) And ... uh ...

EB: A new puppy.

FZ: Well, that's actually ... that's not for me. That's for the whole house. Let's see? What else did I get for my birthday? Um, the Steins gave me two books. One Is called 'A Curmudgeon's Garden Of Love', and a big picture book called 'How Things Work', which is pretty hilarious ... and that's about it. No ties. No underwear.

Fembot (artists conception)

RS: What Is 'Fembot In A Wet T-Shirt'?

FZ: Do you remember 'The Six Million Dollar Man', or 'The Six Million Dollar Woman', those two shows?

RS: Uh-huh. Sure.

FZ: You remember, there was an episode where they were being attacked by 'Fembots'?

DS: (laughter) No.

FZ: OK. These female robots? Fembots. Well, If you've got a robot full of electrical circuitry, and she enters a wet T-shirt contest, (laughter) what happens to her?

DS: Sparks fly.

RS: So, why did you change the name of that on the CD from the original title?

FZ: Why? What does it say on the CD?

DS: 'Wet T-Shirt Nite'.

RS: No, It doesn't. The CD says 'Fembot In A Wet T-Shirt', but originally, on the album, It was called 'Wet T-Shirt Nite'.

FZ: Well, that was the original title. 'Fembot'.

RS: Oh, it was?

FZ: In fact, it was just called 'Fembot'.

RS: Uh-huh. And, I guess, the same thing with 'Toad-O Line', which is called 'On The Bus'.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: All right. I've got one here that you can probably answer with a yes or no. As a kid, did you read MAD magazine?

FZ: Yes.

EB: Do you still read MAD magazine?

FZ: No, but in the world of ...

EB: It's still really good. It's just like it was.

FZ: Really?

EB: I subscribe to it. (laughter)

FZ: Glad you enjoy it. I don't have time to read it. I talked with Jack Kirby today ... the comic book guy? Jack Kirby?

DS: Can't think of who he is.

FZ: He did Dr. Doom, and all those ... for Marvel Comics.

DS: Oh, for some reason, I read D.C. comics when I was a kid, which are definitely more whitebread, as comics go.

FZ: Yeah. Well, I talked to him, and I invited him over. He's comin' over next week.

DS: One last one. What does 'Moo-aah' mean?

FZ: It doesn't mean anything. It's just a noise.

That was the final chapter in our exclusive interview with Frank. We hope you enjoyed it. Be sure to stick around for the next issue SOCIETY PAGES. We will be presenting the first installment of an interview with Dick Barber, who worked for Frank as a road manager from 1968 through 1975, another SOCIETY PAGES exclusive!

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1. In early 1986. Mayor Henry Cisneros of San Antonio sponsored legislation for that city that allowed local health department officials to set a minimum age limit of 16 years for attending a rock concert without being accompanied by a parent. This ordinance was able to skirt First Amendment questions by virtue of being regulated as a matter of 'health', rather than legality.

2. Nicolae Ceauşescu and his wife were apprehended in Romania a short time later and were summarily 'tried' and executed by firing squad.

3. May 27, 1989, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels, Belgium – 'Frank Zappa Day' with the Cucamonga Trio and the BRT Big Band

4. Aug. 18. 1989, KNON, Dallas: "There's this guy named Steve Ciedian(?) who used to be an art director at Hustler [Magazine]. He worked as an orderly in a mental institution. This is gonna sound like a science fiction story, but he was, like, the scoutmaster in the pinhead hut, and the pinheads liked him, and they would express their appreciation by licking his ankles. He had to start wearing these muffs on his ankles."

5. Earlier in the interview, the Zappa kids had come into the room with a very cute Dalmatian puppy, later named 'Shillelagh' by Frank, that they had just gotten. As they explained, they had been at a shopping mall, and the puppy had escaped from a pet store, run up to them, and captured their hearts, whereupon they purchased him and brought him home. The puppy, unfortunately, had a chronic flatulence problem, and proceeded to "breeze", emitting a dreadfully reeking gastrointestinal toxic vapor as Frank held him, much to the amusement of all. (see issue 2, page 29, right hand column)

6. Earlier in the interview, Eric had volunteered to perform the task of hanging ornaments and stringing lights upon a bare Christmas tree which was sitting in a corner of the room. (see issue 1, page 17, right hand column)

7. During the '74 world tour, the Mothers performed an improvisational 'routine', the theme of which revolved around the adventures and experiences of Marty Perellis, girls, and dogs. Do-Do Room Service, also known as 'Room Service', was another routine that often shared thematic material with the 'Marty Perellis' routine. Examples of 'Room Service' can be found on 'The Dub Room Special' and 'You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore, Vol. 2'.

8. This was in reference to the concert on Feb. 14, 1988 at the Tower Theater in Upper Darby (Philadelphia), Pennsylvania in which a fan presented Frank with a Fleet enema (a ready to use disposable enema), and Frank informed the audience, "See this? It's a Fleet enema. You know where they make these things? Lynchburg, Virginia, exactly the same place where [televangelist Jerry] Falwell conducts his ministry. I suspect a symbiotic relationship."

9. Frank referred to 'Ruthie, Ruthie' and 'Babbette', which were recorded on Nov. 18, 1974 at the Capitol Theater in Passaic, New Jersey, and were included on 'YOU CAN'T DO THAT ON STAGE ANYMORE, VOL.1'.

10. Dec. 11,1981 Santa Monica Civic Center. Lisa's performance of 'TEENAGE PROSTITUTE' from the same concert can be heard on 'SHIP ARRIVING TOO LATE TO SAVE A DROWNING WITCH'.

11. Ute Friesteben, of Erlangen, West Germany

12. The earliest reference that the SOCIETY PAGES research staff could find of John Smothers is an Apr. 26, 1974 interview with Frank on the WLZZ, Chicago television program 'Kennedy At Night'.

13. John Smothers' last tour was the 1984 World Tour.

14. The performance is scheduled for Sept. 20-24, 1990.

15. 'Pick Me, I'm Clean' actually was not played in the seventies. It premiered on Mar. 25, 1980 at the Seattle Center Arena

16. The legal dispute between Frank and several ex-Mothers is, at this time, still unsettled.

17. The only known recording from the concert on June 22, 1982 at the Parc Des Expositions in Metz, France used on an album is the segment from King Kong (the "blow job" version) that was used on the YOU CAN'T DO THAT ON STAGE ANYMORE sampler and Volume 3 in the same series. It was also included on VIDEO FROM HELL.
C.Ulrich: Also Church Chat on YCDTOSA 4.

18. EMI released SHEIK YERBOUTI, TINSELTOWN REBELLION, YOU ARE WHAT YOU IS, and in a 'two albums on one disc' format, SHIP ARRIVING TOO LATE TO SAVE A DROWNING WITCH/ THE MAN FROM UTOPIA, and FRANK ZAPPA MEETS THE MOTHERS OF PREVENTION/ JAZZ FROM HELL. Although Frank received royalties for these albums, they were released without his prior consent, and without being remixed for compact disc.

19. The "hot rod" references that Den was thinking of were the ones that can be heard on LUMPY GRAVY.

20. Frank discusses "the Altitude" in detail in 'The Real Frank Zappa Book', pages 164 and 179.

21. While 'Sunshine Of Your Love' was never performed in concert, 'Purple Haze' was performed in front of an audience on May 26, 1988 at Stadthalle in Fürth, W. Germany.

22. Frank spoke on behalf of freedom of abortion at a pro-choice rally on Nov. 12, 1989 at Rancho Park in Los Angeles. (see issue 1, page 42)

23. A short time after this interview, the editors were able to get a piece of the wall for Frank. (see issue 1, page 43)

24. C.Ulrich: "This was presumably Lorenzo "Bobby" Adams, who sang second tenor in The Calvanes. He also worked as a bodyguard for Lionel Richie, Michael Jackson, and Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley.
The Calvanes recorded FZ's song Memories Of El Monte on their 2001 CD In Harmony."

He's A Human Being. He Has Emotions, Just Like Us. Part I

By Den Simms and Rob Samler

Society Pages (US), #6, June, 1991

Professor Zappa granted SOCIETY PAGES a second interview [first interview was printed in April 1990], and Rob and Den once again met with Frank in the comfortable confines of his basement listening room. This conversation took place on January 12, 1991, four days before the conflict in the Middle East boiled over with the first allied bombing runs, and understandably, this first part of the interview begins with the events that were unfolding in the Persian Gulf area.

Den Simms: OK, I'm rollin' now. Um, lemme ask you this, and maybe you can mull this over while we're talkin' and then toward the end of this, you can perhaps help us out. A little while ago, we got a computer to do all the word processing and such for the magazine, and since one of your roles in life is to name things, we thought it might be appropriate to have our computer named. So, rather than put you on the spot, perhaps you could just ...

Frank Zappa: I think "Wanda" is a good name for just about anything.

DS: Wanda? (laughs)

FZ: Yeah.

DS: All right! The computer then is christened "Wanda." All right. That gets that out of the way quick.

FZ: Um-hm.

DS: Um, given the fact that Congress just voted to stand up with Bush [against Iraq] today, let's start off with current events. What do ya think? A year ago the Berlin wall was comin' down, as a matter of fact, the day that we came by, Ceaușescu had just gotten run out of office, Russia was warmin' up ...

FZ: Those were the days!

DS: Those were the days, huh? So what the fuck d'ya think happened?

FZ: Um, there's a certain group of people in this world that that like the cold war. They think the idea of war of any description is a good idea, 'cause that's how they make their money ...

DS: Sure.

FZ: ... and they like to see it keep going.

DS: Yeah.

FZ: And when all that good stuff started happening last year, they must have been *pissing their pants*! They were looking at their profit and loss statements, going, "Wait a minute!"

DS: Yeah.

FZ: So, they got their wish. I mean, let's look at a few of the background details here, just so people don't get the idea that this just sorta popped outa nowhere. For the last eight years or so, the United States government has paid to keep Saddam Hussein in business, because he was conducting a proxy war on our behalf against Iran.

DS: Sure.

FZ: So when you hear these people complain about his nuclear capability, his chemical weapons capability, and his biological capability, whatever capability he has, we're probably the ones who gave it to him. I know specifically, in the case of the biological capability, there was one of those little one shot news stories that reported that the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta had inadvertently shipped to Iraq some *really unusual deadly virus*.

DS: When was this?

FZ: Within the last few months.

DS: Hmm.

FZ: It was a "mistake," they said.

DS: Where did you hear about that from?

FZ: It was on CNN, ...

DS: Oh, I missed that one.

FZ: ... one of those "now ya hear it, now ya don't."

DS: Yeah, that's one I missed.

FZ: The other thing you have to bear in mind is Kuwait, throughout its history in the U.N., has been the nation which was the "singularly most poisonously"... I'm quoting Senator Moynihan now, from his speech, that "Kuwait was the singularly most poisonously anti-American and anti-Semitic member of the United Nations." It has always been our enemy.

DS: I saw [Senator] Riegel on C-SPAN last night sayin' essentially the same thing.

FZ: It's a fact, OK?

DS: Yeah. Always voting against us.

FS: Yeah, but also just in the most nasty way, *always* totally anti-Semitic. Suddenly, out of nowhere, the guy who was doing our fighting for us in the Middle East is not our buddy. The guy who was our enemy, we're sending half a million troops to protect him, and nobody is figuring out what the end result of all of this is gonna be.

DS: Yeah.

FZ: A couple of examples: If you keep the [U.N.] sanctions in place, and you think you can wait it out, you got one little problem that comes up in a few months, which is Ramadan. Now, have you looked to a map of Saudi Arabia recently?

DS: Mmm, well, I'm sure I have ...

FZ: Well, take a look at it. You notice that Mecca is behind our lines.

DS: Right.

FZ: How would you like to be sitting in the sand waiting for sanctions to bite, while *millions upon millions* ...

DS: (laughs)

FZ: ... of Islamic pilgrims flood into Mecca behind your lines?

DS: Yeah.

FZ: And if they go to war, and they don't mop it up before Ramadan, you're still gonna have *millions upon millions* of Moslems behind your lines.

DS: When is Ramadan?

FZ: I think it's March or April.

DS: One thought that crossed my mind is that I wonder if a deal has been worked out with Kuwait that, if we get their country back for them, it's gonna allow us to put in a permanent military base, such as the one we had in the Philippines for so long. I have no doubt that our military planners have been looking enviously at that corner of the world for quite some time, wishing we had a base there.

FZ: It's a possibility. It's easier to get it from the Kuwaitis than it would be to get it from the Saudis.

DS: Exactly. That's the point that I would make. Perhaps a deal was cut. I kind of envisioned it this way: Once the Iraqis started piling up all their troops and stuff on the [Kuwait] border, you know, if you can remember, there were a lot of comments made ... you know, how did we and let them get that far without bein' alarmed about it, and all this kinda stuff. We didn't really seem to jump into the fray until after all of a sudden they had gotten into Kuwait and started menacing Saudi Arabia.

FZ: We *sucked* them into Kuwait! Remember the tape recording of the U.S. Ambassador [to Iraq] saying to Saddam Hussein, "We have no defense treaty with Kuwait."?

DS: Right.

FZ: That's like giving them the keys to the Chevy, y'know, [and sayin'], "Go ahead!"

DS: So, I wonder if it's like, they get into Kuwait and it seemed like they were menacing Saudi Arabia there too, when they were on the roll, goin' through Kuwait, and certainly, I don't think we are in a position to want them to [be able] to get control of that much oil, or to get control over Saudi Arabia, where Mecca is, and all that, so I wonder if at that point we stepped in and then cut a deal with Kuwait. "Look, if you want your country back, let us have a base there." We've got so many troops there, I don't think we're ... I don't think we're gonna leave.

FZ: Not anytime soon, and instead of rotation, you know about the "Love Boat"... [1]

DS: Yeah. Yeah.

FZ: Think about that. I mean, that's one of the most absurd things that I've ever heard.

DS: It's pretty dumb. (laughs)

FZ: Who's bringin' in the whores? My theory is they're gonna bring 'em in by submarine from all the little whorehouses around the military bases in the Philippines.

DS: Offshore whores!

FZ: Yeah.

DS: (laughs)

FZ: So, we'll have a Pimpmaster General (laughter) takin' care of the Love Boat. Here's another thing that people haven't thought a out: If the Soviet Union falls apart, all of those republics on the southern fringe of the Soviet Union that border on Iran, most of those republics are basically Islamic republics

DS: Exactly.

FZ: ... except for the Armenians. They're Christian. But just about everybody else is a Muslim.

DS: Um-hm.

FZ: Now, if Saddam Hussein remains as a strongman in the region, you won't have to worry about him building his own nuclear weapons, because if the Soviet Union falls apart, and he is the hot shot of the Islamic world, all those little republics that move away [from the Soviet Union] could just as easily gravitate toward the Iraqi orbit, and the launch capabilities for all those intercontinental ballistic missiles that are aimed at the United States, they're in those southern republics, fully stocked with hydrogen warheads. So, that's the real thing to worry about, not whether or not Hussein's gonna build this little thing out of chewing gum and Scotch tape and try and launch it toward Europe in the next year or two.

DS: Right.

FZ: If the Soviet Union falls apart, and if Hussein survives this, there's a strong chance that he will make a move in that direction instead of toward Saudi Arabia.

DS: What do you think the chances are of the Soviet Union fallin' apart?

FZ: Pretty good.

DS: They're certainly havin' a lot of trouble.

FZ: There's pretty good chances that it'll fall apart, and I hope it doesn't happen. I think that what they should do is consider a new method of organizing the Union, so the people get the type of autonomy they desire, while at the same time see, if they were a hundred percent autonomous, they would fall on evil days financially and economically, very fast.

DS: Sure.

FZ: It's just like when you give an African country its freedom, what happens? It's a disaster for the first decade, at least.

DS: Right. It would seem to me that those parts of the Union that have an abundance of natural resources would probably do OK, and those that didn't would starve.

FZ: That's true. And anybody that offers them aid, and certainly the oil-rich countries are equipped to do that ...

DS: Sure.

FZ: ... are going to get their pound of flesh in return, y' know. So, I'm concerned about that. That's really the only possibility I don't think that a Russian would launch a nuclear attack against the United States, but a Soviet Muslim might.

DS: Yep.

FZ: So, if Hussein is taken out of the picture, you're still left with [president of Syria] Hafez al Assad and the next Ayatollah. Take your pick. One way or another there's going to be one Islamic strongman who's going to rise up, and if you look at the statistics, the U.S. population is 250 million. There are over a billion Muslims.

DS: That's a lot of Muslims.

FZ: It sure is, and I don't think there's too many of 'em that think that Uncle Sam is a nice guy.

DS: No. That's one of the things that struck me as being the biggest liability of gettin' involved in this thing. If we think the Arabs hate us now, they're really gonna hate us if we go launchin' into Iraq.

FZ: Well, if Hussein shoots at Israel, and Israel enters the war, the Egyptians have already said that they were gonna rethink their involvement in the coalition. Now, let's say you're a U.S. serviceman. Hussein shoots at Israel. Israel shoots back. The Egyptians reconsider their position, and the guy next to you with a rifle is an Egyptian. You're in trouble.

DS: It's a fuckin' mess.

FZ: It's a fuckin' mess. Besides, the population explosion in Egypt is unbelievable. They add a million people every eight months, and I don't think the war's gonna stop 'em from fuckin'. (laughs) There's more Moslems that you can shake a stick at.

DS: That's right.

FZ: So, I think we have a real failure of foreign policy in this country. Everything's so shortsighted. It's infested with a cultural arrogance against Arabs, blacks, anybody else. I mean, there's total cultural arrogance

DS: Sure.

FZ: ... and that doesn't getcha anywhere, y'know. Unless you have some respect for what the other guy is and what he does.

DS: Of course.

FZ: You can't have peace. You can't have anything except war, and it's very arrogant to believe that because you have a technological society, that the machinery that you build that kills people will always be better than the other guys machinery that kills people. I don't think that's true

DS: Right. High tech isn't necessarily always gonna do it.

FZ: Well, the best example is the war in Afghanistan.

DS: A perfect example of it.

FZ: Smart weapons are useless against guys hiding in the hills, 'cause smart weapons are lookin' for tanks and obvious military targets, y'know. All you need is a few medium tech or low tech weapons and a good place to hide. The Afghans really gave those Russians a rough time.

DS: They did. They essentially kicked their butts.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: And the same thing happened to us in Viet Nam.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: It was the same deal.

FZ: A couple of guys in pajamas walkin' around in tunnels ...

DS: That's right. Strike and then disappear.

FZ: Well, the big difference there is that it's not just down to weapons. It's down to motivation, because basically, we have a mercenary army sitting in the Middle East against people who are fighting for their homeland.

DS: Right.

FZ: Who's got the best motivation?

DS: And fighting for Allah.

FZ: Yeah, the big reward.

DS: And we don't really have even a mercenary army. We have ...

FZ: An underpaid mercenary army.

DS: Yeah, an army that's mercenary to a point. They're certainly not mercenary like in some movie you'd see about some mercenaries in Africa. Mercenary to the point that they think they're gonna get the G.I. bill.

FZ: Well, when I say mercenary, they're there being financed by people other than the U.S. government. It's a bunch of hired guns.

DS: Yeah.

FZ: That is, if the coalition partners actually pay what they said they were gonna pay. So far they haven't. So that means you're gonna pay, you're gonna pay, I'm gonna pay ... for what?

Rob Samler: To keep the price of oil up.

FZ: Well, see, the war ain't gonna bring the price of oil down, that's for sure.

RS: Right.

FZ: As soon as they start shooting, you're looking at a minimum of fifty dollars a barrel of oil. That, versus a recession in this country? It's even gonna raise the price of CDs. (laughter) Anything made out of plastic, y'know.

DS: Yeah. So, what do ya think of Gorbachev and his, um ...

FZ: Here's a man in trouble. He's in trouble. I can also see it from his point of view. One of the things he's burdened with is a bureaucracy that he inherited, that he can't just dismantle overnight.

DS: Right.

FZ: There's not enough progressive Soviets to replace the Brezhnev leftovers. You couldn't just push the button and sweep 'em all out, because the problems exist to a large degree in the provinces, in the republics, out there in the sticks where there's a party boss, an old style party boss who does not wanna lose his big house, his black car, his special food, and his special privileges. These are the people who wanna make sure that there'll be no Perestroika. Until ya get rid of the guys at the local level, you can shuffle everybody around in the Kremlin as much as you want, but the problems of getting food to the market, getting services taken care off, controlling the pollution problems from ridiculously outmoded factories all that stuff is in the hands of the regional bosses. You can issue an order from Moscow 'til you're blue in the face, but the country's so big, and each one of these guys has his own little kingdom, it's very difficult for Gorbachev or anybody to make the wheel turn. And if the Baltic states succeed in breaking away, there's no way you're gonna be able to keep all the rest of 'em glued to the Soviet Union.

DS: Do you think they'll break away?

FZ: Well, the presidents of the Baltic States issued a little plea a few days ago, which didn't get much coverage in the news. I heard one mention of it, that they'd jointly said, "Please, the rest of the world, protect us from the Russians." Now, using Bush's own logic that aggression shouldn't be rewarded and territorial integrity should be maintained ...

DS: Yeah, for whatever that's worth, comin' from Bush ...

FZ: I mean, it creates a credibility gap, right away.

DS: Sure.

FZ: If you don't step in to help the Baltics, then don't give me this rhetoric about Kuwait.

DS: I'm not real anxious to agree with Saddam Hussein, but one of the things that he says that's fuckin' true is that there's double standards all over the place.

FZ: Well, there's no question about it, and one of the things that's been pissin' me off is every time they talk about Israel, they say it's the only democracy in the region. It is not a democracy.

DS: No, it's not. That's true. It's not a democracy.

FZ: It's a *theocracy*.

DS: Yes, it is.

FZ: It's just as much a theocracy as Iran or Saudi Arabia. It's government controlled by religion.

DS: That's right.

FZ: And so, how can you have a rational government when it's being controlled from a book that was written a few thousand years ago? It ain't gonna happen.

DS: It's a theocracy. Yeah. (thoughtful pause in the conversation) What a drag!

FZ: Yeah. Well, it helps the arms business. That's for sure.

DS: (laughs) Yeah, there's no doubt that the weapons makers are rubbing their hands gleefully, y'know. This is the next test laboratory. I guess the last one was the Falklands ...

FZ: Um-hm.

DS: ... and that arena wasn't all that big.

FZ: Sold a lot of Exocets, though.

DS: They got to test their Exocets and their Harrier jets, but ...

FZ: It moved the goods.

DS: Yeah. Yep. Well, let's see ...

RS: So Frank, didja have a good birthday?

FZ: Yeah, it was nice.

RS: That's good. Get a lot of nice gifts?

FZ: Well, I got one nice gift. I got a brand new Synclavier.

DS: No shit?

RS: Oh, didja? A brand new one?

FZ: Yeah.

DS: What kind of capabilities is it gonna give you beyond the one that it's replacing?

FZ: It's twice as big, in terms of storage, and it also has a direct to disc system, so it can do a lot more than the old one.

DS: All right. When are we gonna get to hear somethin' from it?

FZ: Hopefully later this year. The other belated birthday present that I think I'm gonna be receiving is a new mixing console for the studio.

DS: All right.

RS: Great.

FZ: Since that will make a big difference in the sound quality, I'm going to postpone the mixing on the Synclavier stuff until after we get the new console.

RS: What kind of stuff are you working on? What are some of the new releases or anything like that?

FZ: Well, you got THE BEST BAND YOU NEVER HEARD N YOUR LIFE coming out in the beginning of February ...

DS: And that's gonna be two discs?

FZ: That's two discs.

DS: And then another two disc set to accompany it?

FZ: Yeah, it's called ...

DS: MAKE A JAZZ NOISE HERE.

FZ: ... MAKE A JAZZ NOISE HERE.

DS: Now, if I remember correctly, that phrase came from the Munich '88 show ...

FZ: That's right.

DS: ... with all the "Ayee, ayee, ayee" ...

FZ: That's right,

DS: ... and all that stuff ...

FZ: ... it's from Big Swifty.

DS: ... that we talked about last time we were here. Is my assumption correct that that set will have more instrumental stuff, and things that lean more towards jamming, and stuff like that?

FZ: Yeah. That's the reason I split 'em up, because THE BEST BAND leans more toward recognizable song titles, y'know, favorites from albums, mostly vocal material, or some of the more humorous stuff. I mean, we're still playing the solos and things in it.

DS: But it'll be more similar to BROADWAY THE HARD WAY ...

FZ: No, it's not.

DS: No?

FZ: No.

DS: How is it different? That album was quite vocal oriented, and ...

FZ: Well, [similar] only in that it's vocal oriented. There's not that much unreleased material on it ...

DS: Ahh. I see.

FZ: ... or new material.

DS: Gotcha.

FZ: Most of the titles are familiar. It includes Stairway To Heaven and Ravel's Bolero.

DS: Oh, great! Great! Um, I guess you had originally considered putting the entire thing out as a four-CD package ...

FZ: I thought that it would be too expensive, and also ...

DS: Hard to rack.

FZ: Well, we've put out multiple sets before. The other logic is there's some people who don't like instrumental music, and some people who don't like some of the weird types of things that are in MAKE A JAZZ NOISE HERE. I separated that from the more entertaining type material.

DS: Sure. That makes sense. Can you give us more details about what might be included in MAKE A JAZZ NOISE HERE?

FZ: Well, you start naming titles and I'll tell ya whether it's in there.

DS: Uh, Desiccated?

FZ: Uh, yes. It's now called When Yuppies Go To Hell.

DS: When Yuppies Go To Hell. (laughs)

RS: I would imagine stuff like King Kong, and Pound For A Brown ...

FZ: There's no Pound, but there is King Kong.

DS: How 'bout Goin' To Hell?

FZ: That's in When Yuppies Go To Hell. It s all inclusive in that.

DS: Gotcha. So that's been sort of the retitled Goin' To Hell with added thematic material from Desiccated? OK. So that's gone through a bit of evolution since the last time we talked with ya.

FZ: Um-hm.

DS: What about some of the other thin s? There's THE LOST EPISODES ...

FZ: It's done. The first volume of it is done, except all I have to do now is put together a timing sheet or it and get a cover made for it. That's gonna be a single CD, and we'll see how it sells, and if it moves, I'll probably put out another volume.

DS: And then you had done an interview some time last year with the International CD [Exchange] newsletter ...

FZ: Um-hm.

DS: ... in which you mentioned oh, the title escapes me now, but an album that you were thinkin' about doin' from the London show, the same show in which some video stuff appeared on UNCLE MEAT, y'know, with the play ...

FZ: Oh, yeah. I put it all together, but I don't know whether or not I wanna release that. It's uh ... what did I call that thing ... AHEAD OF THEIR TIME.

DS: AHEAD OF THEIR TIME. Thank you.

FZ: Yeah, it's done. It's, like, the complete 1968 Festival Hall show.

DS: There ya go.

FZ: But I'm not sure if I wanna release it.

DS: What's your hesitation?

FZ: Because of the lawsuit with the Mothers of Invention, which is all settled right now, but I'm not sure I wanna spend my life tryin' to make those guys any more famous than they already are.

DS: (sigh) Oh, boy ... yeah, I can hear the reaction from the people who are gonna read this, who are gonna say, "Wow! Should we suffer because of that? We wanna hear this stuff! It's fabulous music!"

FZ: Well, wait a minute! I was the one who had to pay the legal fees ...

DS: Of course.

FZ: ... and fight that thing, y'know. The other way to look at it is, "Wait a minute! He's a *human being*. He has emotions, just like us. (laughter) He gets *pissed off*."

DS: Well, that's nice I to have that said in a nice direct way like that. I'm sure people are gonna be able to read that and relate to it. That's cool.

RS: Can you tell us what happened with that, or would you rather not?

FZ: Uh I'd rather not. I just think that it was such a stupid thing to begin with, and even though it's all over, as far as I'm concerned, there's plenty of hard feelings on my side. I got a Christmas card from Jimmy Carl Black saying, "We'll always be friends," and all this kind of stuff, and I'm going, "What the fuck is this!?"

RS: (laughs)

FZ: And I got a phone call from Ray Collins. He wanted to come over and visit me, and I said, "Well, wait a minute! Why should I spend any time talking with you, y'know? You sued me."

RS: Right. That doesn't make for good friends.

DS: One of our readers ran into [Jimmy Carl Black]. He was doing a concert with his Grandmothers gig ... let's see if I can find this here ... (Den attempts to locate the item in a copy of SOCIETY PAGES) ... boy, I hate to paraphrase when I know it's in here somewhere and, I can just read it. [2] Well, rather than usin' up this time searching through this magazine, I think I'll just attempt to paraphrase it. Basically, the reader said that Jimmy Carl Black wasn't too anxious to talk about it, but he expressed something along the lines of "I think he's a fabulous guy, and a great composer, ... beautiful music," and ... you know ...

FZ: Yeah.

DS: And I guess he hoped that there wasn't hard feelings, and stuff like that.

FZ: Well, too bad.

DS: (laughs)

FZ: Y'know, why should I have any good feelings at all toward people who were involved in such a travesty of justice?

DS: Yeah.

RS: Have you gotten a distribution deal in the U.S. for your CDs?

FZ: Yeah, we're gonna be distributed through Capitol.

DS: So it's gonna be the same kind of format that, say, the BABY SNAKES CD was done with?

FZ: Yes.

DS: The Barking Pumpkin label, distributed through Capitol?

FZ: Yeah.

DS: And so essentially, when those things are gonna be released, they'll be released simultaneously that way here in the United States, and with Music For Nations ...

FZ: Music For Nations.

DS: ... in Europe?

FZ: Yeah.

DS: Some of the Eastern Europeans that we've managed to contact have expressed a little bit of concern about not being able to get things on vinyl, 'cause they don't have much access to CD technology. They wanna know ...

FZ: Music For Nations is releasing some of these titles on vinyl.

DS: That'll make them happy.

FZ: I don't know what their Eastern European distribution is going to be, but that's kind of like the last part of the world where we're doing any vinyl, 'cause making vinyl is getting more and more problematical ...

DS: Sure.

FZ: ... 'cause the factories are all closing clown.

DS: Right. There's just less of it happening.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: It's more of an unusual

FZ: So, I realize that about the people in Eastern Europe. I know they don't have CD players, so we've made vinyl masters for a lot of these titles, and I don't know how extensive Music For Nations' distribution plans are for that product, but they're also aware of the vinyl market in that part of the world. I just hope that those people get CD players real soon.

DS: Well, in one of the letters [3], I wrote back to them, and the point that I made was that technology is generally a pretty rapid thing. Improvements happen pretty quick, and it gets cheaper and cheaper and it happens pretty fast.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: The point that I made to this guy was, "Be patient. I think that CD technology will probably come along sooner than you think it will."

FZ: Yeah.

DS: A hundred bucks will buy you a CD player these days.

FZ: Yeah, but a hundred bucks in America ain't a hundred bucks in Czechoslovakia.

DS: That's true. That's very true.

FZ: You gotta jump through a hoop to get a hundred bucks in Czechoslovakia.

DS: I'm sure. We've actually managed to make contact with a few of these people. Not as many as we'd like. There still seems to be a little bit of an obstacle, a communications obstacle that we need to overcome to get in touch with some of those people.

FZ: Um-hm.

DS: (to Rob) What was the name of that guy who sent out that kind of lengthy form letter.

RS: I don't remember.

DS: Somebody that you had met.

FZ: Pabel?

DS: Pabel. That's him! [4]

FZ: Great guy.

DS: His letter was charming. Really nice to read that.

FZ: I made arrangements just a few days ago for the final permission to have The [Real Frank Zappa] Book translated into Czech and published there. Also, the book has already been translated into Russian, and is gonna be made available in the Soviet Union this year.

DS: Umm. Somethin' else that I just remembered too, another point that I'd made with this East German guy about his concerns with CDs, was it would seem to me also, that a lot of the stuff should be available on cassette.

FZ: All the titles from Music For Nations will be available on cassette.

DS: Yeah, and they should have access to cassette technology fairly easy, I would think.

FZ: Well, that's not generally true in some of these places, like for example, I received a letter from a broadcaster in the Baltic states. He has a radio station, a free radio station that's broadcasting rock and roll, and they don't have cassette. They have reel to reel, and he was pleading for access to any kind of material, like biographical material, or stuff that they could use, 'cause they put together these very serious minded shows respective of such and such. So I put him in touch with Co de Kloet, who had just finished producing a birthday special for me in the Netherlands.

DS: Yeah, we were just talkin' about that yesterday.

RS: Yeah, I got to hear it.

FZ: Was it good?

RS: Oh, yeah. It came out great.

FZ: Well, he supplied the guy. I believe he was from Latvia.

DS: That's right. I remember hearin' on the hot line that one of the countries listed as having an FZ birthday special was Latvia and making note of that, thin 'n' that was pretty cool.

FZ: I gotta tell ya about one of the best letters I ever got from the Soviet Union, from an officer in the Soviet Air Force.

DS: Oh! You told us this before! [5]

FZ: I wish I could lay my hands on that. I would love to publish that letter.

DS: You didn't save it or ...

FZ: Gail saves these things, but I don't know where the box is where she put it, this letter written on toilet paper with all the cartoons.

DS: Yeah! You told us about it. It really sounded fascinating. The way that you put it to us was how strange it might be that this guy could be, like, getting off on THE GRAND WAZOO and bombing Afghans at the same time. How peculiar. (laughs)

FZ: I know. It's just baffling. I would like to see some of these more unique letters published in your magazine.

DS: Yeah. We'd love to do it. Our readers are pretty fascinated with this whole thing. We're really anxious to be able to pull into the fold, so to speak, these Eastern Europeans. We've been makin' a little bit of headway with some East Germans. There is this group called the East German Arf Society ...

FZ: (laughs)

DS: and they have gotten together for a couple of annual meetings.

FZ: That's great!

DS: Actually, one of our friends took a trip to Europe, met with those people, went to one of their little meetings, and was really taken with the whole experience of it! [6]

FZ: That's amazing!

DS: Yeah, and certainly we know of this guy Pabel ... is that his name?

FZ: Um-hm.

DS: And you had told us about ...

FZ: Did I tell ya about the one I got from Siberia ...

DS: I think so ...

FZ: ... and that I got a rock and roll newspaper from Siberia?

DS: No, I don't think that you told us about that.

FZ: This guy sent us a pre-Perestroika, pre-Glasnost edition of their, at that time, forbidden underground Siberian rock and roll magazine

DS: Wow!

FZ: ... or little newspaper, actually, and then a post-Glasnost issue that had a photograph of me, my lawyer, and Dennis Berardi, at the Stas Namin Center being introduced to this Siberian blues musician.

DS: Oh, that's right! A Siberian rhythm and blues musician. You just briefly mentioned that. The guy has, like, all your albums, and stuff?

FZ: Yeah. See, at the time that we met him, I didn't have any business cards, and my lawyer gave him his card.

DS: That's right.

FZ: And so, this whole package showed up at my lawyers office about three months ago. It's amazing.

DS: Yep. The world's getting smaller.

FZ: Well, in some respects that's really good. In other respects, it's not.

DS: Sure.

RS: Well, Frank, what have you thought about the magazine so far?

DS: Yeah. Have you had a chance to check us out?

FZ: It's great. I like it.

RS: We haven't had any feedback, but we figured that was better news than we were doin' somethin' wrong.

FZ: No, no. I like it. I think it's really very nice.

DS: Well, let's see, why don't I get into this, which has to do with composing and music? That's the stuff that I like to hear you talk about the most. That's my main interest.

FZ: OK.

DS: In my own measly attempts at composition, found that the chief obstacle facing me was trying to comprehend how to express myself, yet remain reasonably within the confines of the limitations of particular instruments. A perfect example I can think of is that I wrote this piece for a jazz band in which one of the saxophones had a trill, and it turned out that the trill that he had to play involved opening and closing with *all eight fingers*, which was essentially impossible for him to do.

FZ: Uh-huh.

DS: So how do ya, particularly with an orchestra, where you're got that whole array of instruments, how do ya learn the idiosyncrasies of those instruments and the limitations that you have to work in without having to learn how to play each and every instrument particularly when you're self taught, like you?

FZ: Well, you talk to musicians. You show your part to a sax player, and he probably coulda told you that if you woulda written the trill an octave lower, it wouldn't have been the same problem.

DS: Mmm.

FZ: Or, there are books on orchestration that offer some clues, but if you're tryin' to do unusual instrumental technique, you're flyin' by the seat of your pants unless you play the instrument ...

DS: Right.

FZ: Y'know, like people who wish to write unusual sounding multiphonics, unless they are familiar with the mechanics of clarinets, flutes, saxophones, oboes, bassoons, English horns, the instruments that can do multiphonics, unless you really know what the fingerings are, and have devised a way to write that on the paper, then there's no way to know in advance what you're going to get.

DS: That was the problem that I faced. Given the confines of my situation, it was impossible to overcome.

FZ: Well, I would suggest that you try and get in touch with David Ocker, because I believe he made a chart one time of clarinet multiphonics. He came over to visit me about eight or nine months ago.

DS: What's he up to, these days?

FZ: He's still working as music copyist and performing. He has a computer program that lets him do very, very neat music printing. Not Synclavier. It's another kind.

DS: Oh, I got one here! I gotta get this one out! This one's been haunting me fully for the time that this magazine's been going. One of our readers stimulated me with this question, which I had been pondering for years. There's a little riff, which I call "The Hippie Riff," which is that thing that ...

FZ: (FZ sings the riff) [7]

DS: Exactly! Now, in your book, you mention you had heard this "folk rock to death" thing that came from [the Searchers'] Needles And Pins ... [8]

FZ: Yeah.

DS: ... and I had noticed that that crops up in your work in a number of places, usually having to do ...

FZ: With hippies.

DS: ... with hippies.

FZ: It's the hippie noise.

DS: Right. So, can you explain exactly how that came about? Obviously, it's something that you find humorous.

FZ: Well, it's not just that it's humorous, it's so ... cheezy.

DS: (laughs)

FZ: Y'know, like, the Byrds used it all the time on their records.

DS: Sure.

FZ: All it is, you make a D Major chord

DS: Right.

FZ: ... and wiggle one finger.

DS: In my earliest times of learning how to play guitar, it was one of the first things that I went (said in a mock teenage voice), "Oooo! This is cool"

FZ: Yeah, right!

DS: "This is easy, and it sorta sounds cool," in a cheezy sorta way.

FZ: Well, that's what it is, something that sounds cool in a cheezy little way, and everybody did it too much.

DS: And it was something that was definitely related to things of a "hippie" nature?

FZ: Yes.

DS: All right.

RS: We were asking you about, like, who sang on Flambay and those songs?

DS: Ahh, yes.

FZ: Yeah.

RS: ... and Den came across ...

DS: I came across an interview

RS: ... Robert Klein ...

DS: ... that you did in September of '79 with Robert Klein [9], on his television program, and another guest on that program was a woman named Genya Raven, who used to sing with a band called Ten Wheel Drive.

FZ: Yeah, I know.

DS: Was that the woman who did those sessions? On that [show], she said something about doing some session work with and singing ... you had given her some charts

FZ: Yeah. She couldn't do 'em.

DS: That wasn't her?

FZ: No. It's Bob Harris' wife, Thana Harris.

DS: Is that the same person as a "Suzannah Harris"? [10]

FZ: Could be.

DS: Nickname, or different name, whatever. I guess the thing that made me think about Genya Raven is that she had talked about do you remember what she did with you? Something where you had brought her in the studio and did somethin'? She sang a few notes from Time Is Money [on the television show].

FZ: I don't recall any of this, but the final versions that are gonna be released have Mrs. Harris.

DS: Will you release those?

FZ: Yeah.

DS: Do you have any idea, datewise ...

FZ: Some time this year, 'cause we're trying to get all the remaining catalog on CD this year.

DS: Um-hm. Do you remember when the recording sessions when she did those vocals occurred? It's something that strikes me as being mid-seventies, like around the time of STUDIO TAN [11] ... or was it later at the time of THEM OR US?

FZ: The [SLEEP DIRT] masters existed as tracks, and she was brought in to overdub on those tracks after we got the first digital machine. '83? ...

DS: '83. Around the THEM OR US time.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: I noticed that there certainly was a connection between Hunchentoot and that group of songs, and I guess you had done some of those initial recordings around the time of those SLEEP DIRT, STUDIO TAN sessions ...

FZ: Yeah. See, I wrote Hunchentoot when I was in the wheelchair in '72

DS: Right.

FZ: ... and then some of the first attempts to play the tunes were done with that '73-'74 band. The tracks were cut at ... uh ... that place up in Colorado, Jim Guercio's studio ...

DS: Caribou.

FZ: Yeah. We did the tracks at Caribou.

DS: And then, I noticed that on THEM OR US, there's the song Planet Of My Dreams, which I knew was part of Hunchentoot.

FZ: Yeah. That's one of the Caribou tracks with a digital drum overdub. In fact, all these things that are gonna be released with vocals on them have the digital drum overdub.

** * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Tune in next issue when the conversation will drift into such topics as Pipco, the 1973 Roxy film footage, "Smell The Glove," Xenochrony, A Little Green Rosetta, "Rang-tang-ding-dong, I am the Japanese sandman," the unfinished sampled piano concerto, Sad Jane for rock band, harmony constructed from rhythms, the phone call from Conlon Nancarrow, motif transplanting, My Sharona, Theodore Bikel, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Mel Powell's problem, Dweezil's tour, Dragonmaster, Stayin' Alive, composing the soundtrack to OUTRAGE AT VALDEZ, the 1983 San Francisco Varèse/Webern concert, Varèse CD, the risk of audience participation, the 1975 concerts in Yugoslavia, Why Doesn't Get Him A Pepsi?, life and death, and peculiar FZ phrases. Don'tcha miss it, ya hear?

1.. Frank is referring to a government announcement that the United States was considering the rental of a ship from the Princess Cruise Lines for the purpose of having a 'Love Boat" which could be used for the rest and recuperation of U.S. troops. The plan was for the ship to be anchored outside of the territorial limits of Saudi Arabia, thereby not offending the Saudis religious sensitivities that pertain to sex and alcohol consumption. The plan was never enacted. (See issue 5, page 52, right column)

2. See issue 4, page 59, right column.

3.. See issue 2, page 8, left column.

4. Den was mistaken. The person that he was referring to is Pravo Tomek.

5.. See issue 2, page 38, right column.

6.. See issue 3. Page 31.

7. "The Hippie Riff" as sung by Frank Zappa.

8.. See The Real Frank Zappa Book, page 69.

9. September 30, 1979. The Robert Klein Hour.

10. Thana Harris and Suzannah Harris is, indeed, the same person. She is credited on Bob Harris' album THE GREAT NOSTALGIA as Suzannah Harris.

11. Actually, the album that is most closely associated with is SLEEP DIRT, which contained instrumental versions of Flambay, Spider Of Destiny, and Time Is Money, all of which are songs from Hunchentoot.

He's A Human Being. He Has Emotions, Just Like Us. Part II

By Den Simms and Rob Samler

Society Pages (US), #7, September, 1991

The conclusion of the second SOCIETY PAGES interview with Frank Zappa, which took place in the basement listening room of his home in Los Angeles on January 12, 1991.

Den Simms: Will we ever get to see some of the film that was made at the Roxy in '73?

Frank Zappa: Not unless I get to be very, very, very, very rich, and have an awful lot of spare time. All the film has been transferred to video, but none of the audio has been synchronized to it. Before you can edit it, it all has to be synchronized, and that's a pretty time consuming and expensive process. Video editing costs a lot of money, and I don't have any of that equipment here at the house, so I always have to rely on somebody else's studio, and it runs about six hundred to seven hundred dollars an hour.

Rob Samler: Besides being from the movie Spinal Tap, what does "smell the love" mean?

FZ: I think you'd have to ask them.

RS: But what does it mean to you? You've used it in a couple of songs ...

FZ: I would imagine it has something to do with a proctologist. (much laughter)

RS: During the '84 tour, you had the oven mitts, and smelling the glove ...

FZ: Well remember, there were so many entertainers who were wearing one glove in those days ...

RS: Especially Michael.

FZ: Yeah. We would show up for concerts, and there would be people out in the audience with one love on, y'know, like "Ooo! Look how cool I am, 'cause I can wear one glove, too." It was just another example of Americans wanting to be trend-followers. Now you see it, now you don't. So as long as they're wearing the glove, I suggest that they smell it. (laughter)

DS: All right. This has to do with "xenochrony," another subject which has run my telephone bill up with long distance [conversations]. I've speculated about this almost endlessly.

FZ: OK.

DS: Certainly, we understand that the main concept of xenochrony is that you take two ...

FZ: Or more.

DS: ... two or more musical entities that were constructed unrelated to each other, and then combine them for the finished result. If something is done, like let's say, a guitar solo, which is performed in a live concert, and then, that's going to be superimposed over a

song, which is recorded track by track in the studio, if a person who is putting down some of the background tracks, let's say a bass player or a drummer, if he is putting those tracks down, and using that guitar solo as a reference, listening to it over the headphones as he's doing it, would that still constitute what you could call "xenochrony," since there is a reference ...

FZ: A link ...

DS: ... a link that's there?

FZ: Of course. In fact, I've made people double parts of those superimposed guitar things, just so that there is a link.

DS: I don't understand that in the way well, let me back up, and maybe say it this way ...

FZ: "Xenochrony." "Strange synchronization."

DS: Sure. '

FZ: OK. The basic synchronization that happens is the rhythm of the guitar solo, and maybe even the key of the guitar solo, as opposed to something else in another key, in another tempo, those things sandwiched on top of each other, it's creating a rhythmic dissonance, a rhythmic friction ...

DS: Right.

FZ: ... cause it's never gonna resolve exactly, even if the tempos are similar.

DS: Of course.

FZ: It's not gonna land exactly. It takes a certain amount of experimentation to get a musically pleasing result with that. It's not gonna work every time you try it.

DS: In the case of Rubber Shirt where you've got the bass ...

FZ: And the drums.

DS: And the drums, who never listened to each other at the time [of the performances], and then, without them being present, just with the tapes, you combined them together and got this thing called "xenochrony."

FZ: Um-hm.

DS: That's pretty simple, pretty easy to comprehend. But I wonder if it would still constitute what you would think of as being xenochrony if in the course of from what I understand, there was a fair amount of xenochrony that occurred on the THEM OR US album, with live solos that you had performed in concert superimposed on top of backing tracks and stuff that was done in the studio. Am I correct on that assumption?

FZ: More of it in JOE'S GARAGE.

DS: JOE'S GARAGE is the perfect example of it, where almost everything was done that way ...

FZ: The only guitar solo that was "played" in]OE'S GARAGE was Watermelon In Easter Hay.

DS: Then at the time that the other backing tracks were being constructed, and it was all being put together, were those backing tracks in any way, during the portions in which they were backing the solo, listening to that solo as the were playing the tracks, or were they constructed separate?

F2: Uhh, I think in the case of JOE'S GARAGE, usually not.

DS: It would strike me as being something sort of like "semi-xenochrony" since you could say that there is a "link" there, or there is a "reference" that the person could be listening to with that solo, and using what he hears, in some way, to have an effect on what he is playing.

FZ: Well, lets suppose the drums are already laid down, and they're locked into one tempo ...

DS: They're locked in. Right.

FZ: ... and there's no reference there.

DS: Gotcha.

FZ: And then, the guitar solo is coming from tape, but then, you add the bass to it later, and the bass gets to split the difference between the two time domains.

DS: Gotcha.

FZ: What's wrong with that?

DS: Nothin' wrong with it. I guess it's just ... uh ... speculations on my part on whether something like that

FZ: Whether it's pure?

DS: That's right. Whether it's "real xenochrony" ...

FZ: (laughs)

DS: ... or "semi-xenochrony," or ...

FZ: Y'know, you guys are into that ...

DS: This is the kind of stuff that ...

FZ: You're into "smell the glove" land. (much laughter) I mean, basically, what you're looking for is a musical result that works, y'know, so ... there's nothin' "pure" about me, and the tools that I use. I mean, I'm the guy that stick's Louie Louie in every fifteen minutes, and gives you the "hippie noise" [1] whenever it's appropriate.

DS: Right. Well, the things you do provoke responses from us that range from these heavy duty "intellectual" discussions about what xenochrony is to "smell the glove." It runs the gamut.

FZ: Well, that's good, because there's a gamut in the music.

DS: Yeah. I noticed that there was a real similarity in the melody structure of Chana In De Bushwop and that old song Workin' On A Chain Gang. Is that coincidental, or purposeful?

FZ: I don't hear that.

DS: (singing) "Workin' on a chain gang, goin' down, down, down" ... "Chana in de bushwop, in de bushwop"

FZ: Oh, that's Workin' In A Coal Mine.

DS: Oh, what'd I say? "Chain gang"? Pardon me.

FZ: Coincidence.

DS: It's coincidental.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: OK. What was "Pipco"?

FZ: Pipco ... it baffled me for a long time. Turns out to be a little league shirt from Santa Barbara, a Santa Barbara pipe company, I believe.

DS: (laughs) So, maybe it was [pronounced] "Pipe-co."

FZ: Yeah.

DS: What can you tell us about the nearly uncontrolled laughter that permeates the beginning of Watermelon In Easter Hay? I believe it has something to do with the phrase "Who gives a fuck?," or something like that [2], and you're really crackin' up. What was happening during that session that was causing that.

FZ: I had just realized how true the statement was, and I amused the shit out of myself. (laughter)

DS: All right. Here's another one that might be sort of semi-related. Tell us about how A Little Green Rosetta came together. That's a pretty absurd piece.

FZ: A Little Green Rosetta was originally done as a demo at a session at Studio D at the Record Plant ... circa 1974 [3] ... about the time we were recording [The Adventures Of] Greggery Peccary ... '73 or '74, and it was just George Duke playing a tack piano and me singing on top of it. It was just a little stupid song. I always thought it was just a nice little stupid song. It was put into JOE'S GARAGE to function as a replica of a "cast party," like "OK! The show's over! Now everybody in the cast is gonna get together and sing a stupid song!" If it were being staged, that's what it would look like.

DS: That really sheds some light on what the meaning of that is!

FZ: Yeah.

DS: That makes it make a lot more sense.

RS: Well, speaking of that, what's the meaning of "Rang Tang Ding Dong, I am the Japanese Sandman"?

FZ; Oh, Rang Tang Ding Dong, I Am the Japanese Sandman is an actual rhythm and blues record that I owned when I was in high school. It was by a group called the Cel-ohs, I believe.

DS: Can't say I heard that one.

RS: I always wondered what that one meant.

FZ: Well, the way it went, they had this chant that went (Frank sings) "He goes Rang Tang Ding Dong ... humpty doo wah ..." something like that (laughter), and then it stops, and one guy in the group goes, "Hey! All you guys get to say the big stuff, and all I get to say is (Frank sings) He goes Rang Tang Ding Dong ..." (laughter)

DS: Oh, that sounds great! All right. I'll just read ya another one, here. In a 1984 interview with Charles Amirkhanian [4]", you mentioned having composed a "sampled piano concerto" on the Synclavier, which you sounded very enthused about. During our last interview, you mentioned that a piano version of Times Beach is included as part of PHASE 3. Is there a relation between them?

FZ: No.

DS: Do you remember the concerto that I mentioned? What can you tell us about that?

FZ: I never finished it.

DS: Think we'll ever get to hear it?

FZ: I don't know. If I ever finish it ...

DS: (laughs) In another Charles Amirkhanian interview [5], you mentioned that Sad Jane was originally written as a tune for one of your rock bands, who wasn't able to execute it sufficiently for stage.

FZ: Right. It was the '79 band.

DS: I'd really like to hear a rock version of that.

FZ: Actually, maybe it was even before that. I might've even started working on that when Bozzio was in the band. Yeah. It could even go back to '76.

DS: Here's another reference to another old interview that I've heard. In '72, you did an interview with Martin Perlich, and you said that it was your premise that one could have harmony constructed out of rhythms.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: Can you elaborate on that?

FZ: Pitches vibrate on a certain frequency, OK? "A 440" vibrates 440 times a second.

DS: Cycles per second.

FZ: OK. What if they were beats, instead of cycles? So, you can harmonize 440 beats per second, which would be, like, if that was a wood block, played very fast. Like some kind of a roll. And you harmonize that with 120 beats a second on another percussion instrument, or whatever.

DS: And so, when you combined the two, you would have those places where they would strike at the same time ...

FZ: Yeah, but see, that's really not a good example, 'cause those rates are all so fast that you'd just be talking about rolls. But if you understand the concept ... we're talking about "periodicity."

DS: Sure.

FZ: You're harmonizing periodicities. So, in order to hear the type of harmony that I was referring to in that interview, they would have to be lengthier periodicities. Like, if you took the 440, the 120, 360, all these different numbers, and multiplied them out, so that there was more space in between the beats, then you would hear that kind of harmony. That's the kind of stuff I can do on the Synclavier.

DS: Yeah, I imagine the Synclavier would be perfect for mathematically working those things out.

FZ: Speaking of that, I got a phone call from Conlon Nancarrow recently. I finally got a chance to talk to him.

DS: What's he have to say?

FZ: He's ill, right now. He's getting over a stroke, but it was nice talking to him.

DS: Do you think you'll ever be able to expose him to the Synclavier.

FZ: Well, I know somebody else has.

DS: Oh, really?

FZ: Yeah, I heard a rumor that Henry Kaiser had given him a whiff of it.

DS: From the moment that I was aware of both of those two types of music, it seemed to me that his was the wooden version of that, the wood and metal strings version of that.

FZ: For those of you who are interested in his music, I was told that it's just been released on CD in a recorded version that is so accurate that it lets you hear the paper going through the player wheel.

DS: Wow! Would this be, like, his Studies For Player Piano? That stuff?

FZ: Um-hm.

DS: Pretty intense music. You have a very nice and neat term for changing a lyric to suit a specific case. You call that "lyric mutation," which just fits perfectly for what you do with that. You have this other little musical thing that you do, which is to lift motifs from various places, such as Louie, Louie, Carmen, Lohengrin, or My Sharona, and working them into things. Do you have any sort of a term for this, the way that you call the other thing "lyric mutation"? Do you have a term that you use for that?

FZ: I don't think so.

DS: Every time I talk to someone about that, or write something about that, I have to go into this lengthy thing about what it is that's happening, rather than just saying something cute ...

FZ: Just call it "audio junk sculpture." (laughter)

DS: I guess that one of the things that I had thought of was perhaps "motif transplant." That works fairly well, I suppose.

FZ: Sure. Since you're a writer, you can call it whatever you want. (laughter)

DS: I had just wondered whether or not you, in working mode, had a quick phrase for doing that.

FZ: When I'm putting the stuff together, I don't usually talk to the musicians in composer terms. I don't need to be talking to them, telling them mechanical terms of how and why things are done. I just cut right to the heart of it. "Right here, play My Sharona." You don't have to know why.

RS: What is it about that song? Is that a "smell the glove" kinda song?

FZ: It is a "smell the glove" kinda song! Also, while we were recording JOE'S GARAGE, they were upstairs in the little studio at Village [Recorders] recording My Sharona.

RS: (laughs) Oh, so that kind of has some historical significance to it.

FZ: Umm. That's just like when we were shooting 200 MOTELS, on the soundstage next to us, they were making Fiddler On The Roof. (laughter)

DS: So did that have any influence upon the making of 200 MOTELS, and if so, can you give us an example of it?

FZ: Yes. Theodore Bikel, who played Rance Muhammitz in 200 MOTELS, had played in on Broadway a number of times, and when he would come to work every day, it seemed that he wished that he was in the other soundstage instead of ours. (laughter)

DS: Speaking of 200 MOTELS, one of the parts of that movie that just really gets me off is this one sort of candid shot during one of the places where you're making the orchestra do some let's just call it "unconventional" stuff, and there's this one stodgy old bald-headed fiddle player who's just suffering interminably through this stuff

FZ: Yeah ...

DS: I was really taken with that particular part of the movie. What was that guy's ...

FZ: What was his name? (laughs)

DS: No, not so much what was his name. (laughter) Certainly, I don t cane about that, but was he very representational of what that entire orchestra was doing? I can imagine that there must have been some of those people who were having to, y'know ... "What are we having to do this shit for!?"

FZ: Well ... most of 'em, actually.

DS: It seemed, on film, like some of 'em seemed to be enjoyin' it, and kind of crackin' up, and ...

FZ: Well, that kind of attitude is usually reserved for percussionists. They like any excuse to bang on something, 'cause usually during orchestral music, they're counting rests ...

DS: Um-hm.

FZ: ... and so, when they've got a lot to do, they're happy. I recently received a letter from a guy who's a music student in England, and his teacher is Elgar Howarth, the guy who conducted the [Royal Philharmonic] orchestra, and this guy had said that he was surprised that I had used [Howarth] for this job because he appeared to have absolutely no sense of humor. (laughter)

DS: OK. Speaking of other [conductors] and such, the 1970 concert that you did with the L.A. Philharmonic with Zubin Mehta [6], I've heard a cheezy little audience tape of that, and at some point, if memory serves me right, there was something that was said from the stage that pertained to the fact that another composer, if I understand this correctly, named Mel Powell, who was supposedly also in that same concert, had gotten pissed off about something, and had just left, an so, his music didn't get performed.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: What's the story behind that?

FZ: He had some electronic equipment that he was trying to hook up, but they had some technical problems with it. I think it was something for tape and orchestra, and he had some problems, and he just got pissed off and left.

DS: So that was that.

FZ: Yeah.

RS: We heard that Dweezil's goin' on tour.

FZ: Yeah. It's not booked. He's rehearsing now, and Ahmet's the lead vocalist in the band. The album cover's almost done.

RS: We heard that he's doin' some of your songs.

FZ: Not on the album, but on the tour.

RS: How do you feel about that?

FZ: Fine.

RS: Do you think it's a good idea?

FZ: Well ...

DS: You had seemingly been a little you had mentioned that you didn't think it was a good idea for him to use ... um ...

RS: My Guitar [Wants To Kill Your Mama].

FZ: I didn't think that was a good idea, but playing G Spot Tornado is. (laugh ter)

RS: Oh, is that what they're playin'?

DS: No shit!? Dweezil's playin' that?

FZ: Yep.

DS: I had spoken to Mike, and he's really pretty enthused, and ...

FZ: Yeah, it's a fabulous band, and it does all kinds of hard shit. Also, this lyric that I had written in Helsinki in '88 called Dragonmaster ...

RS&DS: Yeah!

FZ: They're doing that. I still haven't heard it. I still don't know what they've done with it.

DS: In '88, had you just written a lyric, or actually written some music to go along with it?

FZ: Oh, I concocted this stupid little thrash metal riff that we rehearsed when we got to the gig in Stockholm, but there's not even a rehearsal tape of it. So they just started from scratch with it.

DS: Yeah.

FZ: They also just did ...

DS: That's right. Mike had told me about that, too.

FZ: ... with Donny Osmond doin' the lead vocal.

DS: Donny Osmond!?

FZ: Um-hm.

DS: Oh, who was it that he had told me ... somebody else cut a lead vocal on that ...

FZ: Yeah, originally it was Ozzy Osbourne ...

DS: Ozzy!

FZ: ... and his record company refused to have it released, and that fucked up the release of Dweezil's album. It could have been out four months ago. He had a contract with another company, and when Ozzy's record company refused to allow his voice to be on that cut, the record company that was negotiating for Dweezil's album dropped it.

DS: That sort of sounds reminiscent of the L. Shankar/Van Morrison deal, doesn't it? [7]

FZ: Yeah, it does. But anyway, he got Donny to do it, and it sounds good. It's coming out on our label.

DS: He's not too bad a singer these days.

FZ: He's a *good* singer!

DS: Yeah.

FZ: And he's a nice guy. He's struggling so much with that Donny and Marie image ...

DS: That's right.

FZ: It's nasty.

DS: I saw him on the Larry King Show a couple of weeks ago, and surprisingly, I found myself goin', "This guy's all right!"

FZ: He's all right.

DS: Yeah. And certainly, I'm aware of his outspokenness about music censorship, and all that. He's on the side of the good guys! [8]I'm glad to see that.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: What can you tell us about the process of composing the soundtrack to OUTRAGE AT VALDEZ? Did you have video stuff that you were able to use as a reference for the composing of it?

FZ: Well, that was, in it's own way, a little disaster, because they came to me at the last minute, and they hadn't really completed putting the show together, so I started working on some of the music without having any pictorial material. I knew kind of what the scenes were gonna be, so I started sketching the stuff out before I even got the videotape. So then they gave me the videotape, and I finished the cues off, and timed them exactly to the picture, to the code that was on the videotape. But it wasn't the final edited version of the show. I mean, very seldom does a composer get to do work to the final, final, final thing, 'cause they're always fuckin' with the films up until the last minute. Unfortunately, the tape that they gave me to write the music to, the one that wasn't the final, was done with "non-drop code." Do you know what that means?

DS: No.

FZ: OK. Well, somebody out there will know this. And then, when they gave me the final videotape, it had "drop frame code." These two codes are different. That meant that every one of the cues that I had written for this whole show had to be changed in order to fit the picture. I had to change all the cues and mix it all in two days, because I was gettin' on a plane for Russia, and they had to give the thing to Turner [9] in a hurry. That was two of the worst days of my life. It was so fuckin' painful that at the end of it I was so exhausted that I couldn't take the flight. I just crashed for a day, and then got on the plane for Russia. So I missed one day's worth of appointments over there, but there was 'nothing that could I be done. It was just an emergency job.

DS: One o' those things.

FZ: Yeah. That's why I don't like doin' those kinds of things. I don't like to treat my body that way.

DS: How satisfied were you with the ultimate result?

FZ: Well, I know it coulda been better. I don't like to have to do anything under duress.

DS: Sure.

FZ: I'm sure it coulda been a hundred times better.

DS: Well, your fans loved it.

FZ: Yeah? Good. They shoulda heard it the way it was supposed to have been. (laughter)

RS: We just heard some of it on Co's special [10], just the music for it, and it was nice to hear it without all the narration, more or less what it should sound like. Given what you just said, it's too bad you did not have more time.

FZ: It's still nowhere near what it shoulda been.

RS: Right.

DS: In '83, I saw the concert in San Francisco in which you conducted the music of Edgar Varèse [11] ...

FZ: Um-hm.

DS: I was familiar with those compositions. I had listened to them many times, and, if memory serves me right, even attempted, perhaps futilely, to read a score along with some of that stuff.

FZ: Um-hm.

DS: But when I saw that performance, it gave me a completely new outlook on that music, simply because was able to see how the syncopations were working within that ...

FZ: In the beat.

DS: ... within that beat that you were swingin' with the baton. It completely changed my whole perspective on that.

FZ: I happen to think I did a fabulous job conducting those pieces! I have a cassette of it, and from a rhythmic standpoint, I think I'm getting real close to what's on the paper on both of those pieces. There were a couple of things that I didn't like about it, but I thought I did a good job on 'em.

DS: How did you feel the ensemble did?

FZ: Pretty good. I had *one rehearsal* ... so ...

DS: That's kinda jumpin' in the deep end, huh?

FZ: Yeah, well, I rehearsed the score at home, just beating thin air, and I knew what the pieces were supposed to sound like, 'cause I'd been listening to 'em for years, so that part wasn't so hard, but I only had about three hours with these guys the day of the show.

DS: Sounded great to the audience.

FZ: Yeah?

DS: Certainly, though I'm familiar with those pieces, I haven't had the hours of exposure that you had. I certainly didn't have my old record with the chalk marks on it to play for my friends [12], but yeah, I and, I'm sure, the rest of the audience, was rather pleased with that concert. Also, the Webern stuff, which ... you didn't conduct any of the Webern stuff, didja?

FZ: No.

DS: I, myself, hadn't been exposed to that much of his music, and it was nice to have a new door opened for me.

FZ: Have you since heard any other Webern pieces?

DS: No, I don't have the access to the music library at the school I used to go to, and since I can't just walk into Tower Records and go buyin' this CD and that CD, 'cause my personal budget won't allow it, it's really slowed down my exposure to new stuff like that. But I know that you have highly recommended ...

FZ: The Boulez recording. There's a four CD set, THE COMPLETE WORKS OF ANTON WEBERN.

DS: That I've been lookin' for, but haven't been able to find it.

FZ: It's Japanese release. It was released by Japanese CBS. I guess they figured in the U.S., nobody would buy it.

DS: Yeah. I keep waiting for Harry Partch and more Varèse. I've gotten a little bit of Varèse on CD, but I keep waiting for that stuff.

FZ: Boulez has a Varèse CD.

DS: Yeah? With what pieces on it?

FZ: Equatorial ... Arcana ... Ionizations ... Density 21.5 ... I think it's got everything except Nocturnal.

DS: Is it good?

FZ: Yeah. The last few cuts are DDD, and done with the Ensemble Intercontemporain. The other cuts are earlier recordings.

DS: OK. Let's see ... we've all heard about the famous calamities, in Montreux, the Rainbow Theatre, and all that. I've always been struck by the stuff that you can see in BABY SNAKES, with people coming onstage, and with Dance Contest on TINSELTOWN REBELLION, where you've got this guy named Butch, who seems like he's just barely under control, and I've always wondered whether or not the risk of bringing people onstage to do those things has ever led to any calamities. Have you ever had any problems from doing that?

FZ: Not from that, 'cause usually I'll only do it in a place where I think it can be controlled, like at the Palladium, and besides my personal bodyguard, there are always two or three of the Palladium bodyguards standing by, so I felt fairly safe, and I don't think that the people in the audience want to hurt me. Maybe one or two ...

DS: I guess I'm not so much thinkin', like, people getting hurt, or buildings burnin' down, or any really heavy duty stuff like that. I guess the sense that I get, like say, from BABY SNAKES and from Dance Contest is stuff *almost out of control*.

FZ: It is almost out of control, because nobody knows what's gonna happen.

DS: Exactly.

FZ: I'm makin' it up as I go along, (laughter) so I think that the people from the audience who come up there, they want that. I don't think that they wanna come onstage and *know that I've planned* something for them, 'cause then they would feel like a victim. If they come up there, and I'll just cook something up on the spot, I'm gonna invent it based on what I think they can handle, and if I guess wrong, then it's my fault. Usually, I think I guess pretty well.

DS: In a way, I think it's some of the best stuff that you do, because it's ... it's ...

FZ: Well, it's not music, but it is entertaining. It's ...

FZ&DS: It's entertainment!

DS: It's art. No doubt about that.

FZ: It's performance art! It's early performance art, that's for sure.

DS: But the thing that I like about it is the recklessness, and the fact that ...

FZ: (laughs) People go along with it!

DS: Yeah. And you just don't know *what in the fuck* is gonna happen! And I like that. It's ... it's dangerous.

FZ: Yeah.

DS: And I think it's a wonderful ...

FZ: "Do not try this at home!"

DS: (laughs) All right. Do you have any memories of the '75 concert in Yugoslavia I'm not even gonna attempt to pronounce the name of the city ...

FZ: Ljubljana?

DS: Yes.

FZ: Yeah. Prior to the concert, as we got to the hall, two things were happening. One, in the adjoining room, there was a ping-pong championship between a team from Taiwan, I believe it was, and the Yugoslavians. We wanted to do a soundcheck, an we were told by

these uniformed officers that we couldn't make any noise because it would disturb the ping-pong game (laughter). It was in an ice skating rink. Our side of the hall was covered with ice, and the ping-pong guys were next door in a place that wasn't. Some kids had gotten there early, and I guess one of 'em was drunk. He had passed out on the ice, and his face was frozen to the ice, (laughter) and one of these soldiers with a big red star on his hat just came along and kicked him. He got up and ripped a little skin off his face.

DS: How peculiar.

FZ: Zagreb was completely different. Zagreb was an interesting concert because even though we had some of these old burly communist types standing right in front of the stage ... they were like bodyguards, looking at the audience, and we were above them, performing ... when we were playing songs like The Illinois Enema Bandit these guys were turning around and laughing, and the audience seemed to understand all the words to all the songs in Zagreb. The English comprehension seemed to be better in Zagreb than it had been in France, Germany, or any of the other countries we played in on that tour. But when we got to Ljubljana, that was a whole other story, 'cause the English comprehension was way, way down. It was a much more difficult concert to put on.

DS: How did you guys wind up being able to go to Yugoslavia at that time?

FZ: We were invited in by the Yugoslav Tourist Board. It was an officially sanctioned visit. And at that time, it's my understanding that Yugoslavia was the most liberal of all of the East Bloc countries. I think that was probably very true. Marshall Tito was still alive at that time, and it was a little bit more suav-ay there than it was in the other countries, which were very, very bleak at that time. But lemme tell ya, if Yugoslavia was the most liberal of the "workers paradises" of that era, the other places must have been pure hell. They wouldn't let us take photographs of anything. They sent a man who look like Khrushchev into our room at the hotel to check to see whether we had any girls. Every night he'd search the room. We were traveling on a bus, and once we left Zagreb and started driving toward Ljubljana, as soon as we crossed the city line, it was like going back two or three hundred years in history. The countryside was so primitive, and on the way, we passed this husband and wife team. They were working in the field, a big, fat woman wearing black ... everything's black ... and she was the "donkey." She was pulling a cart with big wooden wheels filled with twigs, (laughter) an walking behind her was a husband with a switch ...

DS: How medieval!

FZ: It was truly medieval! I couldn't believe it!

DS: Jeezsh! Did those concerts take place at the time when you were touring in Europe, or ...

FZ: I think that was a "stand alone" event.

DS: A special thing where you guys just flew over there and played ...

FZ: Yeah. There was a journalist who traveled with us. A woman from some magazine I can't remember who covered it.

DS: Maybe you can help me to pin that down datewise. Do you remember: if that would have been during that late '75 period?

FZ: Probably, because Norma Bell was in the band. [13]

DS: All right, then. That should help pin things down, datewise, a bit.

RS: Do you think you'll ever release anything with Norma Bell, or what was her name?

FZ: Well, I've got plenty of tapes with her on them, but in those plays, all of our road recordings ...

DS: Bianca.

FZ: Bianca Odin? I don't have too many recordings with Bianca, but the band that Norma was in, we had just started recording our live shows on a Nagra, so we have these two-track tapes that were just made with a stereo microphone hanging in the light truss, picking up the whole ambient sound, and the sound s really not that good.

RS: Do you pretty much have the whole STAGE series one at this point?

FZ: Pretty close.

RS: Is that one of the next releases too?

FZ: Oh, yeah. Volume 4 is set to come out. It's the one that's got Why Doesn't Somebody Get Him A Pepsi?.

DS: What was the basis for the title to that? As far as I could tell, in the versions that I've heard, I wasn't able to hear that anywhere in the lyrics. It's The Torture Never Stops, right?

FZ: All right. Here's the story of Why Doesn't Somebody Get Him A Pepsi?. When I used to go over to [Don] Vliet's house, when he was in high school, the only thing you would ever hear him say was, (Frank imitates Don) "Sue! Get me a Pepsi!" He was always yelling at his mother to get him a Pepsi, (laughter) and sometimes the Pepsi wouldn't arrive, so it was like "Please! Somebody get him a Pepsi!" (laughter)

RS: You told that story in your book.

DS: That one slipped by me. There's a number of phrases which you have jokingly, or perhaps otherwise, used at various times, and that have cropped up in your music, and I wonder if there's any particular significance to these. We'll start with "Good God! Feet on fire! Ain't it funky, now!?"

FZ: (laughs) Uhh, well, haven't you ever heard that kinda stuff on James Brown records?

DS: Sure.

FZ: OK. Well, don't you think it's absolutely absurd if any white person says it? (laughter)

DS: Yes, it is. (laughs) All right. "I wanna hear Caravan with a drum solo."

FZ: One of the earliest gigs that we played as the Mothers of Invention, with that very first band that recorded FREAK OUT!, was in a bar in El Monte, and this drunken dipshit in the audience, that's all he wanted to hear. The song Caravan with a drum solo.

DS: He's perhaps the predecessor to the guy in Finland ...

FZ: (imitating the guy from Finland) "Whipping Post!" (laughter)

DS: (laughs) OK. How 'bout "One more time for the world."

FZ: Oh, where in the fuck did that come from? That was somethin' that Bozzio used to say when he was doing Tryin' To Grow A Chin.

DS: I think this was circa 1980 or so. There were two tours in 1980. In the second tour, there was "No problem," which was said over and over and over again.

FZ: In Germany, there's an expression: "keine probleme." "No problems." And usually (laughs), when they get to the point where they're telling you there's no problems, there certainly are problems.

DS: Yeah. I've efierienced the same thing in Latin America. "No hay problema." All right. And then, "Is this trip really necessary?"

FZ: That is something that they used to have on posters during World War II, when they were rationing ...

DS: Oh, sure.

FZ: ... encouraging people to save tires and gasoline ...

DS: Right. And certainly used in the context in which you have it on the record cover graphics for Ancient Armaments, it takes on a whole new meaning.

FZ: Yeah.

RS: How 'bout "Why don't you sharpen it, then?"

FZ: We used to have a carpenter that worked around here. He talked to himself. He would argue with himself, (laughter) and you'd see him out in the yard, and he'd be sayin' things like, "Where's that screwdriver? Screwdriver don't work. Why don't you sharpen it, then?" (laughter) And he also used to hit his thumb every once in a while, and scream, "Mother Mary 'n Jozuf!" (laughter)

DS: Ahhh, so that's the origin of that one. (laughs) That's great! We definitely got more success with these questions than what expected. I sort of thought that a lot of these things would just be nothin' in particular, but yeah, these all have some significance.

FZ: Most of the things do.

DS: Yeah.

FZ: They might be obscure, but they came from someplace.

DS: Well, that's the kind of thing that in a lot of cases, something that gets said, and we recognize that it might have some significance, some arcane kind of significance that we might not know about, or it might just be some little dipshit thing that was thrown in there, and it's always kind of mysterious when you try to separate which ones have meaning and which ones don't.

RS: My sister-in-law wanted me to ask you kind of a spiritual question

DS: Metaphysical.

RS: Yeah. What do you think happens to us when we die?

FZ: Dust.

RS: That's pretty much what I think. We become worm food.

FZ: Yeah, unless, of course, you're cremated ... BUT ... I will say, and this doesn't put you in the realm of metaphysics, that something animates you while you are alive. There's an electrochemical process that animates this bag of shit that everybody has to drag around, OK? So, it is not impossible that at the point where the electro-chemical process that's motivating the bag of shit ceases to be strong enough to make the bag of shit move around, that energy may be exchanged, and may dissipate and have an existence of it's own without the bag of shit. I wouldn't want to extrapolate that into the world of ghosts and goblins ...

RS: Right. I mean, it s hard to say, since ...

FZ: Well, I believe that those energies and processes exist. I just don't think that they've been adequately described or adequately named yet, because people are too willing to make it all into something that supports a religious theory of one flavor or another. If you start defining these things in nuts-and-bolts scientific terms, people reject it because it's not fun, y'know. It takes some of the romance out of being dead ...

RS: (laughs) Right.

FZ: ... because of people's desires to have eternal life and to extend their influence from beyond the grave ... all that Houdini type stuff ... but basically, I think when you're dead you're dead. It comes with the territory.

ALL: (laughter)

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1. See issue 6, pages 34-35.

2. At the beginning of Watermelon In Easter Hay, Frank, as The Central Scrutinizer, says, "Joe has just worked himself into an imaginary frenzy during the fade-out of his imaginary song. He begins to feel depressed, now. He knows the end is near. He has realized, at last, that imaginary guitar notes and imaginary vocals exist only in the imagination of the imaginer. And ultimately, who gives a fuck, anyway?"

3. This original version of A Little Green Rosetta appeared as a track on the aborted LÄTHER album.

4. This reference actually took place on February 10, 1986 at the studios of KPFA in Berkeley, California when Frank was there to help with KPFA's subscribers drive.

5. This interview occurred on radio KPFA, Berkeley on May 2. 1983.

6. The Mothers joined the Los Angeles Philharmonic, conducted by Zubin Mehta, for a May 15, 1970 concert at Pauley Pavilion at the University of California, Los Angeles, a program that was part of the orchestra's Contempo '70 series. The concert comprised standard Mother's repertoire and orchestral music, and combined rock band and orchestra. Many of the pieces performed were prototype compositions that later formed the basis for 200 MOTELS.

7. In 1979, Frank arranged to have Van Morrison sing the lead vocal on Dead Girls Of London, a Zappa composition that was a track on TOUCH ME THERE, an album that he was produced for violinist L. Shankar (Zappa Records SRZ-1-1602). During a September 6, 1979 appearance on radio WPIX, New York City, Frank explained: 'Warner Brothers Records made such a big deal about the fact that Van ... they said that Van had a contract with them, they claimed that there was no way that they were ever going to let Van be on Shankars album, and so, I finally wound up singing the vocal. Me and Ike." The September, 1990 issue of International CD Exchange contained information that the Van Morrison version will probably be released sometime in the future (perhaps as a track on THE LOST EPISODES).

8. Donny Osmond testified against the PMRC during the Senate hearings in 1985, and spoke out against the idea of record rating in other forums as well, including a September 13, 1985 ABC Nightlife program.

9. Along with CNN, media mogul Ted Turner is the owner of WTBS, Atlanta (the "Super Station"), which contracted the Cousteau Society for the making of OUTRAGE AT VALDEZ.

10. On December 21, 1990, Co de Kloet presented Supplement, a four hour radio special commemorating Frank's fiftieth birthday, on Netherlands radio.

11. On February 9, 1983, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players presented Varèse And Webern: One Hundredth Anniversary Celebration at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco.

12. Excerpt from Frank's liner notes for the reissue of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF EDGAR VARÈSE, VOLUME 1 (EMS 401): "I had heard someplace that in radio stations the guys would make chalk marks on records so they could find an exact spot, so I did the

same thing to EMS 401 ... marked all the hot items so my friends wouldn't get bored in the quiet spots.

13. According to Michael Brenna's the concerts took place in December of 1975.

Zappa on Music and Society: the Mother of all Interviews

Magazine: Telos, Spring, 1991
[by Florindo Volpacchio]

Note: This is not part one of the other interview listed on my pages as "The Mother of All Interviews Part 2" - EM

Frank Zappa has always pushed the boundaries of what is musically acceptable. Though influenced by Varese and Stravinsky, his disdain for the way music is accommodated in contemporary culture and his desire to address it with satire, humor, parody, and a sardonic wit is reminiscent of Satie. The following discussion begins with the problem of modernism in music, but it immediately moves on to the issues of the culture industry.

Volpacchio: I would like to begin by asking what you think of Adorno's music.[l]

Zappa: [The music] sounds like what happens if you tried to write something just like Webern and filled in all the empty spaces. Some of the things I liked, but I liked them because they reminded me of Webern. The choral piece was son of Das Augenlicht and there is an orchestral piece in there that sounds like it could have been from Webern's Five Orchestral Pieces. The piece I liked the best was the most old fashioned one, the tonal chromatic piece. It sounds more like what Wagner would have sounded like if he knew what he was doing. It reminded me of a cross between Wagner and Faure. The other stuff seems to be aesthetically in the region of Webern's aesthetic with the aroma of Berg minus the turgid flux. You can think of it as enjoyable Schoenberg. But it did not come off to me as scholastic. I thought there was a Webern aesthetic, harmonically and melodically [in most of the music]. But the thing that wasn't Webern was how it filled up all the spaces. I did not hear any forward looking compositional ideas there because everything that I had heard, with the exception of the earliest--I presume it was the earliest--piece, the one that was the most melodic, were all things I had heard in one form or another in the music of the Viennese School. If I had more familiarity with the music of Schoenberg, I could probably point out the names of the pieces that sounded like they were clones. I am more familiar with all the Webern pieces, and I just heard a lot of things in there that sounded very derivative of Webern. I don't know who did the work first.

Volpacchio: Speaking of the Viennese school, do you see the collapse of functional tonality and common time to be the single most important development in modern music?

Zappa: No. The single most important development in modern music is making a business out of it.... You have reached the point where you can't just sit down and write because you know how to write and you love to write and eventually somebody will listen because they love to listen and maybe somebody will play it because they'll want to play it. That is gone. The point where anybody who composes has to deal with the mechanics of the performance world, especially as it is characterized in American society, has to have a major impact on what you write. For example, one of my pet theories is that the leading

cause of Minimalism is reduced budgets for rehearsal and reduced budgets for ensemble size. If a guy wants to write something and he knows that there are only a couple of minutes available for rehearsal, there is no way that he is going to write some massive thing for an orchestra. There is no incentive to do it because it will never be performed and it will never be rehearsed.... How can a person be concerned about atonality versus tonality when the real question is how do you get anything played. Whatever it is.

Volpacchio: You've always favored Stravinsky and Varese as more interesting sources for the development of modern music. Why have you preferred the French developments in modern music over those of the Germans?

Zappa: Well you see, that's not the point. You talk about development as if a person has to abandon the way things ordinarily sound in order to think it has been developed. I think that if you write music, you should write for your own taste, whatever you like to hear and whatever style you want to write it in for whatever reason. It is a matter of expression, rather than a matter of living and dying by a certain popular style whatever that style is.... The twelve-tone school at one point was a popular style up until there was a change in funding at the university level for different types of composition. I refer back to this anecdote that I heard about a guy from [one of the foundations] saying, we no longer fund ... that whole post-Webernian school of composers who were doing all kinds of serial experimentation. That was the approved method of expression in the academic world. Suddenly they stopped funding that and started funding Minimalism. And this was an anecdote that I heard around 1983 when I gave an address to the American Society of University Composers. So it did become a trend and it did become a style. And let's say a person wanted to write completely melodic music, while at the time twelve tone style was all that was being funded and all that was being accepted as serious modern music, then people would laugh at you if your composition could be hummed or remembered.

Volpacchio: But don't you think that this is also due to the change in the audiences?

Zappa: Yes. They get smaller.

Volpacchio: But they have not with Minimalism.

Zappa: Well, Minimalism is a different story because its hard to imagine Schoenberg doing an ad for Dewar's scotch. Minimalism, I think, is a perfect form of music to express the spiritual condition of the 80s.

Volpacchio: Yet, Minimalism sees itself as a form of music which includes eclectic, popular elements recognizable by an audience as a necessary response to the abstractness of modernism. Consequently, the music is more approachable.

Zappa: There is a certain merit to that argument. But then on the other hand, if that's true then all they are doing is helping to create the wallpaper to the contemporary lifestyle. There is a certain function to it. But it is really not an integral part of the fabric of contemporary American life. Its the only way in which a composer can function in contemporary American life at all, that is to do this shallow, empty, repetitive, disposable stuff, and then verify it or rationalize it by saying that is the way the society is and we poor composers can only reflect the way the society is. There is a certain amount of truth to that, but then on the other hand, why the fuck bother to listen to it.

Volpacchio: When you can hear, let's say, a Rolling Stones song promoting a commercial

product, what does that say about the inherent properties of modern composition or songwriting if music can be appropriated for such ends?

Zappa: Well, if you think of a Rolling Stones song as a modern composition, you could bemoan the fact that it winds up being used in a commercial. But I believe that at the time most of that material was manufactured, the goal was to make money not to create an anthem for a generation. I am making a distinction between the rock n' roll and the so-called contemporary art music. You would have to be a lunatic to think you could make money from doing the contemporary art music no matter what style you were writing in.

Volpacchio: Yet in your music, despite the overlapping influences, you do consciously maintain a separation of styles and musical forms. Do you see a distinction between high and low art?

Zappa: Or any art at all?

Volpacchio: However, with the increasing appropriation of elements, if not outright songs, of popular music by the "serious" music world, is rock n' roll the new classicism?

Zappa: No. My recollection of the development of the history of rock n' roll music is that from the point where the songs were being performed by young performers--note, not old blues singers or jazz musicians--teenagers started doing it and recording it. Basically, they did a bunch of songs about their girl friends. And that was fairly real. That was the early days of doo-wop music. And from then on they started getting corporate assistance, first from the guys with the cigars sticking out of their mouths in the Brill Building who said, hey I could write one of those. They realized that the biggest profit from a record is in the writing and publishing. You started seeing more of a business involvement of people who really didn't care about a song about ... fill the girl's name in the blank for the title of the song. It was just, o.k, I know what the style is and because I am a professional songwriter I can do this. This eventually turned into corporate rock. So, there is nothing classic about that as far as I am concerned. It is certainly valid and consumable lifestyle material and certainly reflects what is going on in the society--good, bad, and indifferent--the message is tucked away in the music. The goal of creating that kind of material is to make product, not to do composition. I always make a distinction between songwriters and composers.

Volpacchio: There are those who feel rock music offers an opportunity for undermining the consumer culture.

Zappa: I don't buy that. The reason I don't buy it is because at its best, rock music is a folk art form when it comes directly from the people who may know how to play one or two songs on their instruments and those one or two songs mean something to the people who wrote them and sing them.

Volpacchio: Are you referring to the Bob Dylans of the world?

Zappa: That's on a more sophisticated level. I'm talking about Cannibal and the Headhunters, little one shot groups ... the guys who got together who really are not looking forward to a long-term career. But they have that one song that is their song, and they are into it, and they play it for all it’s worth. And it is their personal expression of how they feel at the time they managed by some miracle to get their song on a record. That is when rock is really doing its job. It is kind of a democratic art form because it lets people who are not certified as musicians or composers or songwriters to sneak in there and say

something. But things like that are more and more rare.

Volpacchio: However, the point I would like to make is that, despite the intentions of the guys who create the product, it appears that the music for the audience at least often carries more of a message than may ever have been intended. Isn't this how a song becomes the anthem of a generation? Isn't this what really differentiates rock music from other forms of popular music, the ability to somehow mystically capture the experience of a generation regardless of what may have inspired the song? Even more to the point, if you take the example of the Sex Pistols...

Zappa: They were manufactured.

Volpacchio: Yes, they are a prime example of a band put together to exploit the counterculture market of the music business. Yet, ironically, they were a serious inspiration for a new generation of rock musicians and audiences who saw in them precisely the potential of rock to challenge the corporate culture that had absolutely appropriated rock by the mid1970s.

Zappa: Great, hum me one of their songs. Are we talking about music or are we talking about sociology? Basically, what you are describing to me is a commercial game which has been played. As far as I am concerned, this has nothing to do with music. I am glad that someone sneaks in there and makes a mockery of the business. But how much of a mockery is it if they wind up being sold and distributed by the same business that they intend to mock?

Volpacchio: But doesn't the business need these types of bands to allow it to identify where the new markets are for the next generation it wants to commercially colonize?

Zappa: No major school of rock music ever occurred without being able to dress up to it. In other words, you can't have a trend in music, as far as pop music goes, unless there is a costume that you can wear that goes along with it, that lets the consumer participate in the fantasy. So that is really when you're talking about looking for a market. If a new group comes along, in order for it to be a really mega, mega group, there has to be some way to either imitate their hair-do or imitate their clothes. It has nothing to do with the music. This is the marketing aspect of it. The companies are not going to invest heavily to promote a group just because
they sing well, play well, write well. The bucks are going to go into that group when somebody in an office sniffs the possibility of co-operative advertising and co-operative promotions with soft drinks, with alcoholic beverages, with clothing manufacturers, with shoe manufacturers, with jewelry manufacturers...

Volpacchio: Do you see this as the attempt by the business to exploit the absolute identification of the consumer with his product?

Zappa: I am sure that is in the back of the mind of just about everybody who makes a product. They are either going to do it through some kind of star endorsement or find some other way to tie their product more intimately to the popular culture. Because if it is involved with the culture, it gives the illusion that the product itself has a more exalted, inherent value if it is something that functions in the culture. Coca-Cola is the best example. Basically, it is carbonated brown water as far as I am concerned. But the way in which it has become intertwined with the American flag and every other thing ... For example, I was flipping through C-SPAN yesterday, and they had a round table discussion

about the base closings. The guy who is head of this organization dealing with base closings, his last job was head of the national soft drink manufacturers association. And the fellow who introduced him made the comment that, well no matter what happens in terms of closing these bases, I am sure that they will always be selling Coke and Pepsi at them. It was sort of meant to be a joke, but that's kind of the way it is, no matter what happens economically and otherwise in this country. If you want to really have something for the country to rally around, there is always that soft drink industry.

Volpacchio: Do you really believe the songs themselves help sell the products? Or is that just a fantasy among advertisers?

Zappa: I think that it works two ways. There may be some boost in sales when, for example, Michael Jackson did the two-minute commercial in the middle of the Grammies a few years ago. These kinds of things may give a little boost in sales. But one of the reasons these kinds of companies especially have to tie themselves to pop culture is they need some reason to exist ... to identify with whatever is contemporary.

Volpacchio: What you are saying then is that the only way you can sell something is by being thought to be hip and modern, which is very much associated with American culture.

Zappa: Right. You tie your product to the latest rock video act, you sponsor that act's tour, you put your signs up all over the place when that act comes to town. It's not just that the act has appeared in your commercial on television; the act winds up being a salesman for your product everyplace it goes. The problem with that is the shelf life of the contemporary rock music act is not that long, so that they are going to be constantly searching for new things to identify with.

Volpacchio: Is this affecting the way new acts break into the business?

Zappa: I don't think that it is possible to function as a real touring artist in the music business today without some sort of corporate sponsorship because the costs are so high. The only way you can expect to make a profit on a tour is to have that subsidization.

Volpacchio: This also brings up the question of live performances versus recorded performances. Most popular music acts today appear to function primarily in the studio, and the live performances attempt to reproduce the recorded performance. There is less spontaneity and improvisation, not to mention the sense of musicianship necessary to perform before a live audience. In short, live performances also appear to be more and more programmed. Do you attribute this to the way audiences have become acculturated to music primarily through recordings?

Zappa: It is the groups' fault. You can't blame this on the audiences. Ultimately, it is their music and their reputation. They are not slaves. It is a conscious decision on the part of the groups to go out and do this.

Volpacchio: Don't producers though play a large influence on how music gets recorded?

Zappa: But producers have nothing to do with the live performance situation.

Volpacchio: Yet, if a touring group wants to make an audience happy, and the best way to achieve this is by reproducing something familiar, and this means reproducing the familiarity of the recording as shaped by the producer. .

Zappa: Well, let us take a look at the original recording. Is it a work of art or is it a piece of product? If it is a product, then what do you do? You are out there to sell the product. So, naturally you will want to replicate the product. You go out and be a jukebox.

Volpacchio: But the way that product been produced in the recording studio has also affected the way people listen to music.

Zappa: The way people listen to music has more to do with MTV than it does with the producers. Part of the problem when you are doing the live performance is that you will never look as good as your video, unless your video is some exalted version of a live performance and you take the same 10,000 lamp rig on the road with you and do all that stuff. At that point you can't afford to do it unless you are subsidized. All of the so-called concept videos, there is no way to replicate that aroma on stage. It's still basically just a band and some amplifiers, unless you are going to spend a lot of money on sets. The people who engage in this kind of business practice--designing audio products for sale and then promoting it with replications that are as close to the original product as possible--they do not have any qualms about going out there and lip-synching.

Volpacchio: But have you not commented elsewhere on how difficult it is to play instrumental music because of the audiences' declining attention span?

Zappa: It's only going to get worse if you don't try to give the audience something different to listen to. But remember, there is not just one, monolithic audience out there. And if your product has been brought to an audience's attention on MTV, then the people who live the MTV lifestyle will come to that concert and I will guarantee you they want to see no improvisation, they want to hear no deviation from the original arrangement. They are perfectly satisfied to see people lip-synching and dancing a lot on stage. But that tends to be a younger audience.

Volpacchio: But even older audiences want no surprises, not to mention new music, when they go to a concert. And I am sure that has to do with the fact that concert halls have to fill seats.

Zappa: The other thing that bears on that is the action of unions. When the production cost of a concert is escalated to fantasy realms by union costs, it severely limits the types of performances that you can mount because you are obliged to sell all the seats just to pay your costs.

Volpacchio: It is very difficult then for anyone who is composing new music to find any way of puffing it on stage.

Zappa: Sure. Suppose you are Joe Blow, the composer, and you get a revolutionary idea. What are you going to do with it?

Volpacchio: But there have always been alternative places for artists to expose their work. Don't these provide an outlet for new ideas?

Zappa: The symphony orchestra?

Volpacchio

Zappa: But there, we are getting right to the nub of it. The symphony orchestra is a magnificent instrument and that repertoire, in an ideal world, should grow. And orchestral repertoire should reflect the contemporary life, rather than small groups of people who play endless, repeated patterns. Part of the problem is not just the stagehands' union, it is the musicians' union. Composers don't have a union. Nobody looks out for their interest. At the point where a composer has to get something performed, he is at the mercy of the copyists--who are part of the musicians union--and the musicians themselves. The guy who actually took the time to
write the music will probably wind up making less from its performance than the guy who moved the chairs for the string quartet. If he is going to stay alive, he has to have a part-time job ... something grim, like maybe being a professor. Then everybody goes through this fucking charade for an audience that is not there, an audience that would rather see Vanilla Ice.

Volpacchio: Speaking of Vanilla Ice, how do you explain his success?

Zappa: First of all, I am not sure that the sales figures are accurate. I believe he is an endorsee of one of those soft drink products. And I think that once you are hooked up with one of those endorsements, it is very easy for people to exaggerate sales because a company would not want to have an endorsement relationship with somebody who was not platinum at some level.

Volpacchio: Rap music seems to be a music form that arises totally out of pre-recorded elements. What do you see going on there musically and what has brought it the popularity it has now attained?

Zappa: Rap, I don't believe, could have existed without two or three decades of conditioning through commercials.

Volpacchio: Do you think it is a product of watching too much television?

Zappa: Well, it is just my first instinctual reaction to it. Also, it's all we have left of poetry in America.... All we have left of visual arts is commercials. A lot of the people who are directors of commercials are the most sought after people to direct rock videos, who then become the most sought after young talents to make feature films.

Volpacchio: Do you think Madison Avenue is totally able to manipulate our needs or have people now become so cynical that this very cynicism is all that remains of independent judgment?

Zappa: There is no 100%. Let us just say that the ability of Madison Avenue to persuade people will rise proportionately as the educational system deteriorates.

Volpacchio: But the inability to make ethical and moral decisions can't just be traced to the decline of the American educational system?

Zappa: They have all broken down because in order to have a reasonable standard of living, it is impossible--unless Dad is a drug pusher--to earn enough money in a two parent family just holding a normal job without both parents working. When both parents are out working, who is taking care of the kids ... the TV set. And then the kid does not do any work in school...of course there is no work to do, and the school is for shit, and it is such a

physically abysmal place to be sifting in for six to eight hours a day, and everything that you see on television leads you away from any hint of intellectual development. This is the subtext of all the commercials.
There is a radio commercial running here in California. In it people are sitting around talking about a mathematical problem, and they are having trouble with it. One of the young people in this commercial goes, why think? This is a beer commercial, so its subtext is why think when you can drink.

Volpacchio: Is the problem of the culture industry inherently and predominantly an urban one?

Zappa: It is for a moment. Network television purports to create a type of entertainment which should be acceptable and even enjoyable to people in the heartland. This is all concocted for people in the heartland by people in urban centers who hate the people who live in the heartland, have no regard for them whatsoever, and think of them as bumpkins. Furthermore, on the days when they have to make these decisions to provide entertainment for people in the heartland, these same denizens are struggling for their own existence in a highly competitive environment in these major urban centers. Basically, they have mutated themselves. And because they have this type of a job, all their bad mental health is inflicted on the rest of the population through that medium. Their idea of what is beautiful... their idea of what is valuable... their idea of what is exciting... their idea of what is news... everything is strained through the mentality of these people in these urban centers. The little guy out there in the heartland, he does not have a chance.

Volpacchio: But even those places in the heartland--the sources of American populism that used to try to resist the control of the urban centers -- even they appear to have succumbed to tastes that are shaped outside of their communities. Is there any heritage and tradition left in these communities?

Zappa: There is a heritage... it is dwindling. There are traditions... they are vanishing. But there are also aspirations, and the aspirations unfortunately seem to lead these people in the direction of the behavior of their brethren in the major metropolitan areas. Figure it out. You live on the farm ... you're in the Midwest ... you're in the heartland ... and you like Madonna? Why? What can that possibly mean? Well, it is a symbol of excitement. It is a symbol of what you do not have where you live. And now how are you going to attain it? By modifying your heartland community to a place where you can one day sprout your own Madonna? Or do you just--as soon as you get to be old enough to travel--go to where those Madonna people are so you can participate in it?

Volpacchio: However, these heartland communities have also had a checkered past. Many people point to these communities as being the source of American racism and ethnic hatred in their desire to be closed, homogenous communities.

Zappa: Not to the degree that they are any better or any worse than what goes on in the metropolitan areas. The only difference is that in the metropolitan areas, there is more media, people making speeches... there is more hypocrisy. It’s the same racism.

Volpacchio: Do you see racism as being the greatest problem facing this country today? Is this the same racism that as always existed in the culture or is it a new strain?

Zappa: It is a problem, but it is certainly part of the raw material of the American society. I think you've got the pigmentation racism ... you've got the class- based racism ... and

you've got a kind of politically based racism too. And one of the things that, if you're trying to arrive at an assessment of whether or not the American strain of racism is more virulent than in other societies, you might point out that we probably have more racists rubbing up against each other in this country than people in other countries. There are more people to hate. I remember when they first tried to promote the idea of brotherhood week and all the rest of this stuff in the 50s. It didn't last very long ... It was one of those kind of promo concepts that they didn't keep going with it because there seemed to be no real reason to.... Why bother to bend over backwards to have anything that resembles brotherhood when after the Reagan administration years it was officially announced by the government that greed is good? Well, if the government says so, then why do I need to look out for anybody else when the most important thing on the planet to do is to look out for yourself?

Volpacchio: Thank you for this interview.[2]

* [Ed.] Those readers who suspect that this title has something to do with Saddam Hussein should recall Frank Zappa's old band, "The Mothers of Invention."

[1.] Recordings of Zwei Stucke fur Streichquarteft, op. 2 (1925/26); Sechs kurze Orchesterstucke, op. 4 (1929); Drei Gedichte von Theodor Daubler fur vierstimmigen Frauenchor a capelia (1929-1945); Zwei Lieder mit Orchester aus dem geplanten Singspiel "Der Schatz des lndianer-Joe" nach Mark Twain (1932/33); "Kinderjahr," Sechs Stucke aus op. 68 von Robert Schumann fur kleines Orchester gesetzt (1941). in Kompositionen (Wergo. 1990).

[2.] This telephone interview was conducted on May 16, 1991. Frank Zappa has recently announced his candidacy for the presidency of the United States.

POETIC JUSTICE. Frank Zappa Puts Us In Our Place

Musician, November, 1991
By Matt Resnicoff

We usually celebrate artists for their accomplishments rather than for the traits that make them creative. These, we'd just as soon crucify them for: their single-mindedness, retentiveness, mortality. The very best of human nature. All this and more lies just past the studio booth whose welcoming sticker reads Corporate Rock Still Sucks, past a wall of videotapes holding every breath of CNN Desert Storm coverage, and a morass of reels marked with recognizable titles, and a few unrecognizable. In a small chair past all this, in a dim receiving area, Zappa sips tea to nurse an uncharacteristically hoarse, weak voice.

Zappa's artistic standing remains respectably constant, though his celebrity fluctuates in almost strategic sympathy with the needs of his brisk little family business. In the weeks prior to organizing and releasing 14 hours and 53 minutes of newly unearthed music, his presidential candidacy went under judicious evaluation (he hasn't yet tossed in his hat), he booked a fact-finding trip to Prague (after being kiboshed as trade rep by a politician's PMRC wife) and was diagnosed by journalists as having cancer (" You can put me on a torture rack, he says, "and I wont discuss my health").

Two hours after arriving, I know what Frank Zappa thinks, though I can't really say how he feels. His art is, always has been, a distorted window; he's probably never written a song in the first person without the voice of some character he was looking to crucify often for those very same traits that make him an artist. But what a character. We'd only spoken once before, and he says he remembers my face. I tell him our conversation took place on the telephone. Frank points to his head, smiles an uncharacteristically warm, avuncular smile, and says his memory is *that* strong....

MUSICIAN: *You don't miss playing guitar?*
ZAPPA: Not really. I'm faced with a bit of a dilemma which is going to smack me right in the face on Thursday. I'm going to Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and I've been invited because they're having big celebrations. The last Russian soldier leaves Czechoslovakia on the 24th and Hungary on the 30th, and they want me to bring my guitar over and play. And I haven't touched it for *years*. I don't have any calluses! I don't know what to do with that fucking thing. And if I don't take it along with me I know a lot of people will be disappointed, but I know if I plug it in they're going to be even *more* disappointed, *[laughs]* 'cause I can't *play* anymore.

MUSICIAN: *Your guitar solos have a healthy disorganization to them, uncharacteristic of what's going on in guitar right now.*
ZAPPA: I make them up as I go along. People now, they practice their fuckin' solos! Most guys who go onstage are going to replicate the solo that was on the record because the audience must hear that in order to think the guitar player is good. "Can he play exactly what he did on the record? Okay he's good." "Did he play it faster or louder than he did on the record? Boy, he's better than I thought he was." You know? I make it up as I go along. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not, but.... If I had to play exactly what I did on any record, I'd have been out of the business a long time ago.

MUSICIAN: *I don't want to insult Los Angeles, but it just strikes me that...*
ZAPPA: Go ahead, insult it as much as you want. *I* always do.

MUSICIAN: *All right, the most improvisational occurrence in Los Angeles city limits* is *when someone farts.* So *I'm surprised that since you hardly deal with record companies other than the one you own, and with a fax machine you could live wherever you want, you live in a town that offers no live music.*
ZAPPA: But I don't participate. I have no link to the cultural life of Los Angeles. The closest I'm going to get to anything that is official L.A. cultural life will be when I go into a rehearsal hall that's being provided as a courtesy by the LA. Philharmonic to this German organization who are sending 25 musicians over to rehearse some of my music for a festival--they sure as fuck ain't doing it for me. Let me give you an anecdote: About a year after I did that concert with the L.A. Philharmonic in 1970, they said they would like to have me write a two-piano concerto and they would give it the world premiere. I said, "Oh, that's really very nice of you." They said, "Yeah, but we want you to *buy* us two grand pianos." And that was the last I had to do with the L.A. Phil, okay? Why pick on me? 'Cause I'm in rock 'n' roll? What, you think I should go out and spend $100,000 to get you a pair of Bösendorfers, so that you'll do two rehearsals and play my two-piano concerto? Go *fuck* yourself. So this town offers me nothing in the way of live music or cultural anything. I get excited if I find a good restaurant and my wife and I can go out every once in a while and get some decent food. And *they're* few and far between. I stay home. All my stuff is in the house. This is a self-contained cottage industry: Editing here, storage in there, studio in there, another vault under the front yard with 10 times this amount of stuff stashed away. A little office up above my bedroom. A bed and a kitchen. And I don't need to participate in the so-called cultural life of this city, because it's just like you said: If somebody farts, that's as improvisational as it gets. The only other improvisation that could occur is if somebody adds a little bit extra rosemary to the sauce that they put on a fucking dumpling or something that they give you in one of these nouvelle cuisine restaurants. It's very freeze-dried here. *It's pathetic.* And that's the reason why it's so sad what's happening in New York now, because I always thought, "What an unbelievable place New York was."

MUSICIAN: *Soloing, you favor certain modes, and most go over less intricate vamps. For some players that means more pressure to come up with something interesting. You often emphasize the nine and mixolydian ideas in your solos--do you have target notes? Is it conscious?*
ZAPPA: They're aesthetic decisions, sure. I mean, some people like to play on II-V-I changes and can bebop themselves into a frenzy; and there are other people who even like to *listen* to that sort of thing. I can't stand it myself. I pretty much *loathe* chord progressions. *[chuckles]* Look at Indian musical culture: They don't have too much in the way of progressions, and that's some of the most interesting, beautiful music ever. You don't need changes to play great lines. All you need is a tonic and a 5th and away you go; sometimes you don't even need the 5th. That's the aesthetic principle that I go on. But if your ear hears a harmonic foundation *of something,* then the interest of the solo is the theoretical difference you perceive on a note-by-note, nanosecond-by-nanosecond basis of what the improviser inflicts on the established tonality. In other words, if you hear in the bass a C and a G, you know, "You're in the key of C, buddy." You are anchored to a tonality, and when a soloist comes along and plays the C#, he's sending you a *message.* And where that C# *goes* is part of the adventure of playing the solo. And if he's playing a B natural or an F# against those notes... they're like ingredients in a stew. I mean, there's a right way and a wrong way to stick a C# on top of a C-G groundbase. If you play all notes that are part of the C major scale, the recipe you have just prepared is oatmeal, know what

I mean? So it's like the difference between eating oatmeal and eating salsa.

MUSICIAN: *Steve Vai uses the human speech pattern as a source of phrasing. "Andy" has that dynamic.*
ZAPPA: People don't talk in a straight up-and-down rhythm. You're used to hearing conversation with pauses, inflections, different kinds of accelerandos, ritardandos in the speech, so why should you just play the same way? Because if you're playing a solo you're talkng to the audience, aren't you? Or you *ought* to be, unless you're Milli Vanilli.

MUSICIAN: *Steve also mentioned the most valuable lessons he had learned coming from the "school of Zappa"; one was to keep your publishing. And by listening to five seconds of his improvisations you can hear the others. What would* you *hope musicians bring to their own careers after working with you?*
ZAPPA: *I* don't know. I mean, that's up to them. If they had signed up for a school and were paying me to teach them, that would
be a good question, but I don't think it applies. In fact, it's a very *bizarre* situation, because I'm paying *them* to learn. How sick is that? I don't think the people who came into the band did it because they wanted character development. Generally, if they had a unique musical ability, they knew that if they went in *any* other direction, they would never be able to be unique. What is Steve Vai going to *do?* As a young musician, how do you get to *be unique,* when a record company doesn't want to sign unique people? The easiest gig for a unique person is a format where uniqueness is acceptable. Bruce Fowler's highest practical note on the trombone is an E flat above the treble clef which is the same highest note as an alto flute--fairly unique guy. How often do you get to use that if you're a trombone player? A drummer like Vinnie Colaiuta is capable of playing all these unbelievable polyrhythms, but if he gets a studio gig, that's the last thing in the world they want to hear on their record: You know, "Just give me that fuckin' fatback." So a lot of these guys were auditioning just because their musical alternatives led them into situations where they wouldn't have the chance to do anything challenging. But then a strange thing happens when they get in the band: They *complain* about being asked to do things that are hard. And then after they *leave* they brag that they were in the hand!

MUSICIAN: *Virtually everybody I've encountered who's worked with you has spoken reverentially. That's not necessarily a function of being in an employer/employee relationship.*
ZAPPA: Well, everybody's got different motivations, but there have been certain trends that I've spotted, since I've hired maybe *115* guys over the last quarter of a century: They *all* are different when they leave, for better or worse, and what they leave with depends on what they wanted to get while they were *in* there. Because I've never withheld any information from any of them.

MUSICIAN: *But you still show signs of contempt for a system that creates a musician capable of meeting the requirements you demand as a bandleader. "Yo Cats " from* Mothers of Prevention *suggested that maybe the mechanization of studios was poetic justice for those unmusical people who became sight-reading cretins.*
ZAPPA: Well, a "Yo Cat" is *beyond* being a sight-reading cretin. A "Yo guy" is part of this special species that popped up in Hollywood studios--the A-team mentality. You have an A-team mentality in the New York studio business too, I'm sure. A handful of guys get all the work. That's the A-team. And they do it day in, day out, three sessions a day; they grind it out. And one must ask at the end of the day: "Was it music?" "Did they care?"

MUSICIAN: You *sort of indict Berklee in that song.*

ZAPPA: Well, let's look at the motivation for going to Berklee. Do you go to become a musician because you love music, or to get another credential? "I've been to Berklee, I can play fast! That means I'll get a studio gig!" Then so *what?!* I like music. I like music as a living, breathing art form, whether you're doing it with a machine or your home Casio system or in a band. I like the idea that human beings can create music. And when they're serious about it--when they're interested in *music* rather than careers or stardom or lip-syncing--then it's a beautiful thing. And anything that works against that, I hate. I really hate it. I do not indict Berklee for creating people with skill, all I say is, what is the skill ultimately going to be used for? Why do people go there? The only *good* reason you should do anything is because you want to do it *right,* not just for money, not just to be famous, not just for bullshit reasons. And whether you go to Berklee, or Juilliard, or you take a part-time job in a gas station so you can practice at home, whatever it is--if the motivation is to play music, to make capital M, Music, something that's part of your personality, you're contributing that to the overall global world of music, that's good. The record business is not good. The touring business is *not* good. The TV music award-show business is not good. This is all shit. And I *hate* it. And unfortunately, as a *bandleader,* you have to deal with people who come into the band and use it as a stepping stone, and think if they can just survive that *one* tour, they can go out and say they were in the band. Then it's like a Berklee credential. Well, more power to 'em. If that gets them a job someplace, fine. But it's just sad. You know, I look at what Dweezil is going through now. He's got a good album, he's a good musician, he really loves music, and now he's finding out, as a young man, what show business is really about. It's depressing.

MUSICIAN: *That hadn't already trickled down from you?*
ZAPPA: It's different. I can *tell* him*,* "Yeah, this is the shit." He just finished his first *tour.* Now, that's where you find out! [*laughs*] He just did a couple of weeks in Europe and a couple in the United States and I said, "Okay Dweezil, you see how you feel"--I mean, he came home *beat.* "You see how you feel, don't make the same mistake I did; I did it for 25 years. Don't do it"

MUSICIAN: *But most of your recorded output--your bread and butter--has come from that work.*
ZAPPA: But see, I did it at a time in American musical history when you could get *away* with it. And I established a franchise for a certain clientele that happened to enjoy that particular service provided by me. I don't think in a world of MTV, fake awards shows and massive beverage sponsorship for mega-tours which rely more on stage lighting than musical artistry--today's world--that anybody could manage to do what I did...and survive. Couldn't do it. Because when I started, *nobody* knew what the fuck they were doing--there were no rules. You made it up as you went along and whatever worked worked. And if you just kept doing it long enough you could stay in show business. I refused to stop doing it, and that's the reason I'm still here.

MUSICIAN: *It's discouraging to see the way things have developed, compared to what I hear about the '60s.*
ZAPPA: Well, I have never been a fan of the '60s, but one thing seems perfectly clear at this time: Sociology and politics aside, it was easier for an oddball something-or-other to get a record contract *then* than it is now. Not with a little label, but with a major label. You could do it because there was an upheaval in American music: when the British Invasion occurred, and *millions* of albums were flying out the door, the work of people from another country who didn't look like U.S. musicians--we had surfers,and they had people who had long hair who sang and played their own instruments. It was a different thing: self-contained bands. The U.S. music business went, "What the fuck is that?" So they were

starting to issue contracts to anything they could get their hands on they thought might sell. That's how we got in. Not because somebody said, "Oh, this is great." They just said, "Okay, we'll try this shit."

MUSICIAN: *!s there a significance in the revival of Faces-era rock that bands like the Black Crowes are now purveying, as opposed to something that isn't so directly derivative? Like R&B, or some of the music that you grew up by and glorified even on your stranger albums?*
ZAPPA: Well, the idea of setting yourself up as a derivative band is a road that leads nowhere, because what you're hoping to do in recycling a previous fad is to revive that fad, and that's giving you a very short shelflife. Your "revivalist band" will be useful as an entertainment device only if the trend resurfaces in a general way, and will only be viable as long as that trend is regurgitated by the pop press. And if it catches on with clothing manufacturers and they choose to support it with a style that re-evokes that era; then you can be a "thing," but a short-term thing. What's that got to do with music? That's got more to do with how to make a buck, and I think it's a dubious way. I'm not trying to cast aspersions, because I've never heard the band you're talking about, but as a general concept, revivalist groups are at a disadvantage because they limit their audience and their shelf life.

MUSICIAN: *Really arcane or avant-garde music kind of experiences the same thing.*
ZAPPA: What do you mean, arcane? If a guy creates something new and original, is that bad?

MUSICIAN: *Not at all. I'm not using the word pejoratively, but more like something...*
ZAPPA: It's something you never heard before.

MUSICIAN: *Something that's frighteningly...*
ZAPPA: Original?

MUSICIAN: *Yeah.*
ZAPPA: I want the frighteningly original *all* the time. I want *those* guys to have a chance, to be able to say and do something that is new. Not like a new group that plays faster than the *last* group that was imitating a certain trend, but now with better hairdos, faster fingers--or a lead singer who sings higher with a raspier voice. I mean, *[chuckles]* there's *really no* aesthetic future in that. There's always a commercial future in it because the entertainment mill will most assuredly grind out more products like that.

MUSICIAN: *But once something becomes stylized, it becomes rigidly marked by the public. The notion of a "guitar solo" has preconceptions placed on it, even if it's Allan Holdsworth who does it, no matter how amazing or how frighteningly original; people automatically refute it because it's supposed to be selfindulgent or "for musicians." It's almost like things become iconographic and somehow lose their value for outsiders.*
ZAPPA: Well, whose fault is that? That's what *writers* do. Musicians don't do that. The average person doesn't sit around thinking about the "iconographic problems of a gultar solo." You're talking about a sociological, emotional phenomenon associated with the need of a writer to earn a living by describing something which is very difficult to write about: music. And the *hardest* thing to write about is *that* kind of music, when it's really personal, when a guy is really trying to do something, which I think Allan Holds- worth is. He's a brilliant musician. And when you start digging the thesaurus out and delving into things like "iconographic" and tacking shit like that onto stories about guitar solos, well, *[laughs]* then the problems begin! A guy might listen to it and go "I like it" or "I don't like it," but to have it

explained to him by a writer that "we now have an iconographic problem," that's another can of worms, wouldn't you say?

MUSICIAN: *Well, you might be putting the cart before the horse. I don't know if writers are the sole cause for certain music being shunted off by the mainstream of the industry.*
ZAPPA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Sure. How do you think taste is *made?* See, it works like this: A guy's writing in a magazine which some insecure record company executive has been told is hip by his secretary that he's trying to get to blow him. She says, "This is a hip magazine," so in order to get that blow job, he's gotta read a few paragraphs. And in this magazine he'll read this: "There's an iconographic problem with Allan Holdsworth's guitar solos." And a trend is set in motion where the next person who bears these dangerous iconographic tendencies comes to get a record contract from this guy and might be refused. In the hands of insecure record company executives, A&R men and pootheads, the writer's article can be a dangerous force in shunting off certain types of expression, just because it is no longer *hot* since it would seem so from this fountain of information, this special hip magazine--and we know how many hip magazines there are that determine these things. The minute somebody says, "Icono- graphic-No Longer Hot," you're dead. Be cause you're dealing with real mental pygmies in these record companies. Not to cast aspersions on any *pygmies* in the audience, *[laughter]* but these guys do not have musical priorities. Their priority is, "Keep my job, keep my job." They get up in the morning, look in the mirror, spray their hair, say, "I'm going to *keep my job.* And I don't care whose dick I have to suck, I don't care how many Milli Vanillis I gotta sign, I'm keepin' my job." And they do. They recycle from one company to another. They get fired, because, oh, they made a mistake, they signed the wrong Milli Vanilli and they got caught. They'll wind up at another record company. These guys never go from record company to *gas station;* they move *sideways,* from record-world company A to record-world company B. The top executives just rotate. Now, how did they earn the *right* to be the gods of the record industry? These fuckers came from the shoe business, a lot of them. And they are the ones who finally make the decision of who gets the zillion-dollar contract, the big tour, the big push, the big endorsements, the big hosejob on MTV. These esteemed gentlemen, based on advice received from hip magazines that tell you what's hot, will then reshape the size and texture of American musical culture in their own pinhead image.

MUSICIAN: *I don't want to leap to the defense of the press because I don't respect a lot of it. On the other hand lwrote an article recently in which I suggested that Edward Van Halen might have stagnated with his band, and his manager called me and up and called me a "no-good motherfuckin' kike."*
ZAPPA: Oooh! Nice man! I hope you ran *that!*

MUSICIAN: *We did, and we received a lot of mail. Not that I needed anymore convincing, but that was a confirmation that...*
ZAPPA: People are listening! I'm telling you, that's the influence.... The worst thing that can happen to a person who is an MTV-size "star" is for somebody to write they're not hot. I mean, *[smiling]* stagnating is not very hot. And that's a career-crunching thing, especially to apply to somebody who's playing hot guitar solos. To even *imply* that--you can imagine the manager going, "My 15 motherfucking percent, it's goin' up in smoke! That little kike! The motherfucking kike! I gotta call him now!" [*laughs]* I don't even *know* this guy, but I just hear that ratchet going.

MUSICIAN: *Now, how culpable is the press there? I feel it's that Edward Van Halen is being constricted by somebody who would rather not see him go off and do a progressive power-trio record.*

ZAPPA: Well, let me set you straight on a couple of things that I see slightly differently than you do, partly because I'm 50 years old and you're not--and I don't want to sound like grandpa. But to reinforce the negative side of the activities of the press: I lived as an entertainer through one era of rock 'n' roll where the rock press was *absolutely* the blowboy of the industry. In the '70s, when corporate rock really blossomed into this stinking apparition it became, companies were giving cocaine, girls, money, junkets and all this stuff to famous rock writers, just greasing them from one end to the other so they would write nonstop, *wonderful* glowing articles about groups that needed to be promoted. It was *pure grease,* okay? I detect from the way that this interview is going that you have a little bit more integrity--a *lot* more integrity--and more of an intellectual edge to what you're trying to do than the people I had to talk to in the world of rock in the last 25 years. I mean it as a compliment, I'm not trying to stroke you or any thing. I find it refreshing to talk to anybody connected with a music magazine--whether he's a little motherfuckin' kike or not [*laughter*]--who has an idea of the relationship between music, the industry and the realworld. Because most interviews you do, people are just talking about...nothing. No-thing! I put up with that for too long. And it wasn't until 1985, when I went to Washington to testity in front of the Congress, that I started having the chance to talk to people in the press who were not from rock 'n' roll, just regular writers, who were intelligent, normal human beings. I started doing fewer rock interviews, and my attitude toward the press changed at the moment where I didn't have to do so many conversations with the people who determined whether or not you were *hot.* The world of hot-I don't give a *fuck* about the world of hot. And that's *all* they care about in that world, okay? So I wouldn't be too quick to defend the rock press because of its rather...checkered past. And it may have evolved, and it may have matured, might have even been *perfected* by now, who knows? I don't *read* it any more. But if you're any example of what's out there in terms of rock interviewers, I'm gratified. Especially if you're going to get a call like that from Eddie Van Halen's manager, you must be doing something right.

MUSICIAN: *I don't want to keep harping on Vai, but he was talking about the experience working with you that brought him through a really weird period after he left, where he was seeing things with a relentlessly cynical perspective, but wasn't balancing it with your sense of humor. Were you aware this was happening?*
ZAPPA: What, that he was getting more cynical?

MUSICIAN: *Well, to the extent that he was throwing himself into fitful depression and nearly lost his mind.*
ZAPPA: I didn't invent Steve Vai's mind. All I did was sign his paycheck, and I had no idea that was going on with him. I saw him a few times sick onstage, but that was physical, not mental. We played a gig in Salt Lake City--he was a real soldier, he was puking into a bucket on the side of the stage, but we got through the show. I always saw him as a thoroughly professional, on-the-case, totally talented, fabulous musician, and you couldn't ask for a better guy to be in your band. It was great. And I had no idea that he had these fits of depression because suddenly he found himself to be cynical, but I mean, how bad was that? Is he doing badly now? I think if he's doing well it's because he *did* have at least a *passing* acquaintance with cynicism. You can't just go into rock 'n' roll and think. "Oh, now the world is really wonderful," because boy, will you be disappointed.

MUSICIAN: *You told me you didn't want to tour anymore, but I read it was because of your bass player; Scott Thunes.*
ZAPPA: Scott has a unique personality. He also has unique musical skills. I like the way he plays and I like him as a person, but other people don't. He has a very difficult personality: He refuses to be cordial. He won't do small talk. And he's odd. So what?

They're *all* odd! They should *tolerate* each other. Unfortunately the real world doesn't work that way, and I don't want to name who got this thing started, but it turned into a personal vendetta against Scott Thunes. A couple of guys in the band were the ringleaders and were doing such petty stuff. On the last of 11 dates in Germany the promoter was going to give us a big cake onstage and had all the guys in the band's names on it, and one of these assholes who didn't like Scott sneaked backstage and scraped his name off the cake. It was *nauseating* stuff, and it had gotten to where we had done two months in the U.S., two in Europe and were supposed to have a short break and do good-paying, large-scale outdoor things all over the U.S. And by the end of the European part of the tour, things were going astray rather badly and I started taking a poll of different guys in the band: "Do you hate Scott Thunes so much you wouldn't go onstage with him for these gigs in the summer?" and they all said, *[gremlin voice]* "Yes, we hate him, oh, we hate him. He's *bad.* He's a bad person. He can't play the bass." They were so convinced this guy was the loser of all time that I had no choice. If you replace *anybody in* a band that has rehearsed for four months, you've gotta go back into rehearsal. I couldn't replace Scott to assuage everybody in the band who hated him. There's no bass player who could have done that job. The repertoire was so large, the workings of the show so complex, you had to know so much--there was no way. So I had to lose the income of all those dates because the band refused to go onstage with Scott Thunes. That's why I put out *The Best Band You Never Heard in Your Life.* But let me give you the final payoff to this: The band realized they provided for themselves total unemployment. Everybody on that tour got paid but me. I lost $400,000. And within six months I was hearing, "Man, we made a mistake. Scott's not such a bad guy." And the same people who hated his guts were running into him in restaurants and saying, "Scott, I'm *sorry,* I don't know what got *into* me," this kind of stupid, stupid shit. It was just like little children ganging up on a kid at a boy's school. It was really P-U.

MUSICIAN: *Poetic justice...*
ZAPPA: Well, I'm not interested in inflicting poetic justice on anybody, remember? I like music, and if that band had stayed together all this time, not only would it be the most outrageous touring band on the planet, but I'd still he playing guitar and I wouldn't be forced with my dilemma going *to* Prague and Budapest. I pay people to rehearse, so in order to change *anybody,* I would have to rent a sound stage, which is $2000 a day, stick the band in there and pay them to learn to live with another bass player. And I would resist doing that simply because I don't like the idea of having a whole band ganging up on *me,* forcing me to get rid of a bass player I *liked.* I *enjoy* playing with Scott. So, what's the fucking deal? And one of the most egregious things: One of the sax players who'd been complaining that Scott didn't give him enough support on his solos--after he heard *Best Band,* he came over here and said, "Oh, he sounds *good,* man." *[laughs]* Stuff like that makes me sick.

MUSICIAN: *Eccentricity's got to be an offshoot of being an excellent musician, because you've excluded things for the sake...*
ZAPPA: If you're highly motivated to be a spectacular drummer or guitar player or whatever, other parts of your life will suffer. People looking at you living your life will go, "He's weird," not realizing you don't *give* a fuck about those other parts of your life 'cause you're focused on something else. The person might say, "W'hy does he behave like that?" And the answer is, he just doesn't care as much about that other incidental shit as you do. That doesn't make him a bad person; the same thing is true of computer programmers, scientists, painters. When you care so much about one thing, maybe some other stuff slides, like your personal appearance, your breath, your teeth, your wardrobe, your hairdo, your complexion, your desire to engage in small talk, whatever And then other

people who really care about things like, "Are you hot?"--hot in terms of acceptability--worry about total acceptance all the time for everything they do.

MUSICIAN: *Mercer Ellington once said that Duke was not necessarily a good father, but he was a good man. Do you ever think that the two things might be separable?*
ZAPPA: Well, let me put it to you this way: I happen to think I'm a *great* dad, and I think any of my kids would confirm that. Whether I'm a good man, I don't know, that's pretty subjective, but I think the empirical evidence is on my side that my kids turned out okay, and they like me and I like them. And we get along fine.

MUSICIAN: *Have there been parts of your life that you've neglected because you've been as absorbed as you are in your music?*
ZAPPA: Well, what am I missing? Do I regret not going horseback riding, or learning how to water ski? Well, no. I don't want to climb mountains, I don't want to do bungie-jumping. I haven't missed any of these things. If you're absorbed by *something,* what's to miss?

BBC TELEVISION TRIBUTE - 1993

From the Late Show Special broadcast on BBC2 on Friday 17 Dec 93.
This programme was previously broadcast on 11 Mar 93 and 23 Jul 93.

Continuity announcer (language disclaimer): Our Late Show Special, now on BBC2, celebrating the life and work of Frank Zappa. Including a rare interview recorded in the last months of his life, in which he expressed his controversial ideas in language that marked his unique style.

Michael Collings (presenter/narrator): Good evening. Earlier this month the musician Frank Zappa died at his Los Angeles home, shortly before his 53rd birthday. Zappa was one of the most exotic, original and complex figures to have emerged from rock culture. Bandleader, guitar hero, composer, satirist, and political commentator, Zappa managed to avoid being easily categorised for over three decades. And uniquely among rock idols, the career of the man who put the sneer into rock evolved outside the mainstream of pop history.

Something of a recluse in his final years, while struggling against cancer, Zappa continued to work right up to the end of his life. In January of this year he agreed to give The Late Show an exclusive glimpse into his world, in what turned out to be his last interview for television.

[Title: Frank Zappa 1940 - 1993]

[Film: early B/W film of the Mothers playing]

[FZ is seated facing camera in a big purple chair, wearing a black shirt and jacket.]

FZ: Some scientists say that a major building block of the universe is hydrogen, because it's the most plentiful element. But my theory is that the universe is made out of stupidity, because it is more plentiful than hydrogen. Since it's more plentiful, why shouldn't we talk about it?

I was happy to outrage anybody who'd like to be outraged.

Take the Kama Sutra. How many people died from the Kama Sutra as opposed to the Bible? Who wins?

Matt Groening (Cartoonist 'The Simpsons'): American culture has a lot of great moustaches in its history. Mark Twain had a great moustache, Charlie Chaplin, Ben Turpin ... but Zappa, he's got the best moustache in American history. Got the moustache, right, and he's got that little thing on his chin, I think it's called an imperial,
that is, like, the coolest thing. That's like one of the great icons of the twentieth century.

[Film of FZ's home]

Narrator: Frank Zappa has spent thirty years refining the eclectic style of his music. Since he abandoned live rock in the late 80s, and was diagnosed with cancer in 1991, Zappa has worked almost exclusively from his Hollywood Hills home. A compulsive archivist, Zappa recorded nearly all his live performances of the last fifteen years, and has retrieved from record companies the master tapes of all his studio albums.

[Film of two of FZ's technical team in hard-hats with lamps on, walking through the vault: "Where did Frank say it was?"]

This is just one of four underground vaults in his house, home to hundreds of hours of Zappa music, waiting to be digitally remastered and re-released on CD. The Old Masters series, with help from his in-house technical assistants.

FZ: Just because you're not working with musicians doesn't mean you're not working. There's certainly a lot of things that have to be done, in a very methodical way, with devices that I use. It's not that I don't interact with people, because I do have a staff here that helps me do all this stuff. I like doing it, and it seems to me that it's liberating not to have the payroll of a rock 'n roll band, and to be the person that has to deal with the types of problems that a band leader is confronted with. It'd be a different thing to be an orchestra conductor than to be a rock and roll band leader, it's two different kinds of roles there. I'm much happier working with my highly skilled technical team here at the Utility Muffin Research Kitchen. I really enjoy working with them.

Narrator: Now completely outside the mainstream music scene, with his own state-of-the-art studio, record company, and distribution network, Zappa has achieved a unique degree of control over his work. The struggle to achieve independence as a musician has been marked by extremes of indulgence, but also of inspiration, even genius.

[Film of the Mothers playing King Kong, BBC TV studio 1967]

[Film of Lancaster scenery]

Now resident in his Laurel Canyon retreat, the young Zappa spent his high school years in a very different California. Here, in the remote town of Lancaster, near Edwards Air Force Base in the Mojave Desert. Zappa's father was a research chemist for the military. The family moved from the East to the West Coast when Frank was ten.

FZ: I know I was weird. You know the standard uniform that the rap musicians wear - the hooded parka with the hood up and sunglasses on - that's what I used to wear to school every day. I had a little goatee and a little moustache, and I used to take my guitar with me to school - it was not electric - and spent my time between classes plunking around on that.

Jim 'Motorhead' Sherwood (Saxophonist, Mothers of Invention 1964-69): When I knew Frank in school, he was two years ahead of me in high school. Lancaster was just a barren town, it seems like all the misfits from Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties were sent up there to get out of everybody else's face. There wasn't really anything to do there. You spent most of your time just wandering around through the desert, trying to occupy yourself with anything. That's probably why most people got into music or drinking all the time. On weekends that's about all there was to do. One boring town, believe me.

FZ: I hadn't been raised in an environment where there was a lot of music in the house.

This couple that owned the chili place, Opal and Chester, agreed to ask the man who serviced the jukebox to put in some of the song titles that I liked, because I promised that I would dutifully keep pumping quarters into this thing so I could listen to them. So I had the ability to eat good chili and listen to Three Hours Past Midnight by Johnny Guitar Watson, for most of my junior and senior years.

[Film of records owned by FZ. Three Hours Past Midnight by Johnny "Guitar" Watson, Motor Head Baby by Young John Watson, Rat Now by Johnny (Guitar) Watson, Woman Trouble by Guitar Slim & his Band, What Have I Done Wrong [by ?], Walking With Frankie by Frankie Lee [?]. Soundtrack: Three Hours Past
Midnight]

[In this shot, FZ is shown in a medium shot, and we can see that he is seated in a room at home, with table lamp, house plant, cup and saucer, hi-fi equipment, gold disks, and mementoes such as licence plates on the walls, and a large free-standing ashtray. The chair has a dark wooden frame and arms, and is upholstered in purple.]

I'd come into contact with Charlie Parker records and things like that, but they didn't hold my interest. I couldn't follow it. Same kind of argument that you'd get from people today, just "Huh, what are they doing? They just noodling around", you know. I mean, now I understand why they're noodling and where they're noodling, and I can tell the difference between good noodling and bad noodling, but without certain musical clues it just all sounded like noodles to me.

Narrator: As well as black R&B, young Zappa liked Stravinsky, and the dissonant sound experiments of the 1920s French composer, Edgard Varese.

FZ: I don't know how I finally got introduced to it, I guess it was because of a Varese album that I read about in a magazine. Went out and bought it. Imagine what a shock that was, after listening to rhythm 'n blues records, and then coming home with that album and hearing Ionisations and Octendres and things like that. I liked it a lot. Nobody had to explain it to me, it wasn't like jazz. They were doing some noodling in there but it sounded like they knew what they were doing.

It just sounded good to me. The way I perceived the dissonance was: These chords are really mean. I like these chords. And the drums are playing loud in this music, and you can hear the drums often in this music, which was something that you could not experience with other types of classical music.

Narrator: For all his fascination with wildly opposed musical styles, Zappa's rite of passage as a musician took a conventional course, playing in local bands and suffering the indignities of the cocktail lounge combo. In 1964 Zappa went to Los Angeles and met a group of musicians who were willing to try something new. This was the band who were later to become, under Zappa's tight control, the Mothers Of Invention.

FZ: When we finally got a record contract with M-G-M, some pinhead there had decided that The Mothers was a bad name for a group and that radio stations would never play our record because the name was too risque. At the time, if you were a good musician, you were a motherfucker, and Mothers was short for a
collection of motherfuckers. Actually, it was kind of presumptuous to name the band that, because we weren't that good musicians. By bar-band standards in the area, we were light-years ahead of our competition, but in terms of real musicianship, I suppose we were

right down there in the swamp.

So, out of necessity we became the Mothers Of Invention. Just by adding those other two words to it, we were able to keep the record company happy. But naturally, the radio stations didn't play the music anyway, because it wasn't about the name of the band, it was what we were singing about, and the way the music sounded.

[Home movie style film of the Mothers playing and clowning. Soundtrack: Hungry Freaks, Daddy]

Narrator: The Mothers' debut album, Freak Out, was a new kind of collage of pop, blues and psychedelia, with intelligent lyrics. Music that used parody and black humour to engage in sharp social satire. The Mothers seemed to be at home with a commercial pop sound, and at the same time utterly contemptuous of pop.

The album's acerbic style took even the Mothers' record company by surprise.

FZ: They didn't find out until the day we went in to start recording, in fact they didn't find out until the second song. I think the first track we laid down was Anyway The Wind Blows, and the second track was Who Are The Brain Police?, and I could see Wilson on the phone through the control room window, calling the head office in New York saying 'Well, er you're not going to believe this ...'

Matt Groening: The amazing thing about Freak Out was that there was nothing quite like it in rock 'n roll at the time. It was really simultaneously crude and ugly, and incredibly sophisticated. The Beatles were funny, but there was nothing with the kind of sneer that you could feel in the music of Frank Zappa.

Narrator: Although the Mothers' sound could only have come from LA, it wasn't until they left there in 1967 to take up a six-month residency at the Garrick Theatre in New York, that they began to find their audience.

FZ: We were never that popular in Los Angeles, because even compared to New York, Los Angeles was a very conforming community. It just seemed to me that at that time San Francisco was more conformist, Los Angeles a little bit less, when we moved to New York there was virtually no scene at all, there was no long-haired anything there. People looked at us like we were from Venus. By the time a scene did finally erupt in New York City it was much more interesting because it had ethnic diversity, it had cultural diversity because of all the different parts of the city where there concrete artistic things going on. There were things happening that were experimental, not necessarily wonderful, but at least experimental, people trying to do something that was different.

[Film: Garrick Theatre. Soundtrack: Call Any Vegetable]

We could do anything we wanted out there. It didn't make any difference. That's what the audience was buying a ticket to experience. Two main demands of the audience: they wanted to hear some material that they could recognise, and they wanted to have some sort of live performance experience that nobody else would give them. A surprise, in other words, whether it was going to be musical, or theatrical, or something, they would like to have a surprise, and I would like to give them a surprise.

It's not like you'd go on stage and there would be a sea of people with long hair all decked

out in 60s fashion, like the special Time-Warner version of the 60s, they weren't like that. They were people who were from the suburbs, who were coming to this concert out of curiosity, weren't really part of any kind of a scene, except their local community, and basically stood there with their mouths open just going 'Duh!'.

Ruth Underwood (Percussionist, Zappa Band 1972-76): Oh, I was probably one of those rather stiff people from the suburbs - I think some of us did understand, and we kept coming back for more, and more, and more. I remember being very upset when they finally finished their stint at the Garrick Theatre and went back to LA. I felt as if the real heart had gone out of New York City, and I had to get back on with my Conservatory music training life, which seemed very dull after this.

One never knew what to expect, there were some nights that you just heard pure music, and other nights, Motorhead'd be talking about fixing his car, with Jim Black's drum beat in the background. Sometimes Frank would just sit in a chair and glower at the audience. Sometimes there were more people on stage than there were in the audience, and because of that, Frank even got to know some of us by name! There were so few hard-core Mothers freaks then, that we were all very noticeable to him. I remember Stravinsky being played, I remember droning music going on for ages, and then in the middle of all of that, the song that then became 'Oh No, I Don't Believe It', sort of breaking through the clouds, and I mean it just shocked me, how anything could be so beautiful, and how such beautiful music could come out of such bizarre looking people.

[Film: photo session for We're Only In It For The Money album cover. Soundtrack: Oh No]

Narrator: But having established the Mothers as one of the most formidable and original bands of the 60s, now with a huge following in Europe as well as the United States, Zappa played a characteristic hand. After five years and seven albums, he suddenly disbanded the group.

Motorhead Sherwood: It was getting to the point that I think Frank wasn't going in the direction he wanted to, wasn't being as creative as he wanted to. So that's basically how we disbanded. He just got tired and said 'Hey guys, let's go out into other groups, let's infiltrate other bands, and let's get some fresh ideas. You guys come back, and maybe we'll get together three or four years down the line, bring in your ideas from the groups you have, and let's get back together and do something. But it just never happened.

Narrator: Zappa surprised his large following with the relatively smooth style of Hot Rats, the first album released under his own name. It was mostly instrumental, featuring extended sax, violin and guitar solos, which were melodically accessible as well as musically sophisticated.

FZ: It was a major flop in the United States, but for some reason became a Top Ten record in England and Holland, and is regarded nostalgically in those places. But the revolutionary thing about that album was the quantity and texture of the overdubbing that was being done on it. Sixteen-track recording was a brand new medium. The 16-track machine that we recorded that album on was practically a prototype. It was as large as that fireplace, this monstro machine.

Narrator: Hot Rats was completely free of the dada disruptiveness that had characterised the Mothers' albums. The one vocal track, Willie The Pimp, was sung by an old high school chum, Captain Beefheart. Then, just when a solo career looked likely, Zappa re-

formed the Mothers, but with a different line-up, including two singers brought in from the Sixties teen group, the Turtles. For the new group he invented a new theatrical style. The old surrealism was played down in favour of increasingly bawdy slapstick humour.

[Film: Penis Dimension performance]

200 Motels - the scatological on-the-road documentary film and record - was Zappa's Heaven's Gate. It cost a lot of money, and it met with a mixed critical reception. But the film was important because it showed Zappa's first collaboration with a classical orchestra.

[Movie excerpt, 200 Motels]

Through the 70s, Zappa the composer and Zappa the rock performer developed an easy co-existence. When he played live it was with a band who could perform both complicated instrumentals, and salacious songs with driving rhythms.

[Film: Montana, TV concert, 1974]

Ruth Underwood: Let me tell you, Frank was leading the band from every possible aspect and angle and vantage point. He had a series of hand signals and the body language was very important too. We all had our eyes on Frank all the time. You had to, because you never knew what was going to happen. In the middle of doing
something that was very much expected and rehearsed, he could just turn around and do something, he could gesture a certain way, or make a face, or interject something to the microphone, just say something or start some banter with whichever lead singer happened to be there, and the whole concert would take a completely different turn.

It was free in that way. It was incredibly tight, but it was free as well. It's an interesting balance. The bottom line with Frank was that he wanted to, and needed to, get the best that he could from everyone. That was of paramount importance to him, and I think that's why he got such really extraordinary results. He saw what
each of us could do, and he wouldn't settle for anything less than that.

FZ: For me it was always more interesting to encounter a musician who had a unique ability, find a way to showcase that, and build that unusual skill into the composition. So that for ever and ever afterward, that composition would be stamped with the personality of the person who was there when the composition was
created.

[Film: City Of Tiny Lites, Stevie's Spanking performances]

Steve Vai (Guitarist, Zappa Band 1980-82): He has a really incredible insight, sort of an intuition about musicians. I mean, I sat in a room and watched him go through hordes of musicians, bass players, when we were doing auditions. And he just seems to know, he seems to be able to get what you're about musically, and
take that to the top of your ability.

Like I say, Frank was the bandleader, and I was a musician. I was very fortunate because I loved his music. I remember he said on the phone to me, after he first heard me play, he goes: 'I think you're great, and I'd like to try you out for the band. But how do I know you won't be a miserable son of a bitch, having to play my
music?' You know, I was the tool of the composer.

Narrator: Although it couldn't strictly be called commercialism, Zappa knew his audience. And he deliberately stoked up the sexual satire, and the mythologising of low-life rock tour culture, with seemingly endless songs about groupies, motels and tour buses, and impossibly perverted musicians. Zappa on sex is what usually draws the critics' fire.

FZ: Well, let's look at the statistics. I think that the last time anybody checked, my catalogue is about 1200 titles. And I would be amazed if more than 100 of them were on sexual topics.

[Film: Titties And Beer performance]

I'm making comments about society, and the society that I was commenting on was engaged in what they love to describe as the sexual revolution - a world of sexual incompetents encountering each other under disco circumstances. Now can't you do songs about that?

[Film: Keep It Greasy performance]

Matt Groening: One of the great things about Frank's satire is that he picks targets that can't stand to be laughed at, and that's a real great secret of humour. You gotta pick the people who get the most upset and crazed when you make fun of 'em, and Zappa did it time and time again. He picks targets I would never pick, but he does some good ones, and that's definitely been an inspiration to me.

[Film: Bobby Brown performance]

FZ: Well, have you ever looked at people fucking? Ouch! I mean that's a silly looking thing to begin with, it's silly looking, let's face it, it looks silly. Why not say so? And from that you can develop a number of theories about whether or not it should be celebrated. I mean, so what if it feels good? It's still silly.

Now's the time to whip out this magazine. Please - look.

[FZ holds up to camera a copy of 'Future Sex' magazine. The front cover shows a couple wearing virtual reality goggles and some kind of teledildonic attachments - the headline is 'Cybersex'.]

Here it is, the 90s. Here's where we are. We're to this, now. Shouldn't we say something about people who will buy thousand-dollar dildo-things that they plug into their computer, to do stuff to them, with 3D goggles attached to it? There's gotta be an album in there someplace!

[Film: Broken Hearts Are For Assholes performance]

It's pretty easy to hate me for whatever you choose to hate me for, because I'm virtually unrepentant, and I just don't care. My insensitivity is pretty evenly spread around.

[Film: You Are What You Is video]

Narrator: In 1978, after winning a lawsuit against Warner Brothers, Zappa was free to put out records on his own label. He then went into overdrive. In the 80s he was releasing

albums every few months, including one of live guitar solos - 80 minutes' worth. Zappa now entered rock's pantheon of guitar heroes.

[Film: Zoot Allures - New York concert 1984]

Steve Vai: Frank had great feedback control when he played. And it was great to sit and just watch him play. Sometimes I didn't have anything to play, and I just stood and watched him. When he's playing his guitar, when I was on stage watching him, he always seemed like he had a concentration that was ... 'cos the solos would go on for nine minutes, ten minutes sometimes, even longer, but there was a continuity to it, that I think a lot of people, after a point, it just becomes like flailing. But he definitely held a continuity, and that's a great strength of concentration.

[Film: Black Napkins - Concert 1979]

In my opinion, in a sense it's old-school in the way that it's bluesy. I mean, he has very many different sides, he can just play over a real heavy rock vamp, really heavy, and he's got these blues runs and stuff that are very, in a way old style but they have a lot of balls or grip to them, like, they have a lot of cayenne pepper or
something.

[Dweezil and Ahmet are filmed in a room in front of a line of guitars. Dweezil is holding a burned Stratocaster with left-handed machine heads and a standard fingerboard. Ahmet is holding a paper cup containing a tea-bag]

Dweezil Zappa (Son): He doesn't look at the instrument in terms of the standard ways, like for example you pick up the guitar and there's little boxes that your fingers can go in, that you could conceivably play in. Frank doesn't think of those sort of technical things at all, he's all over the place, playing notes that he wants to
play, because he hears everything that's going on in the music around him, and he creates this 'air sculpture' as he calls it, when he plays. It should be illegal.

Ahmet Zappa (Son): It's so cool, at rehearsals or something, he'll be playing and all of a sudden you'll see his face go ... you know, and he's like: 'God', like someone, like, made a mistake, and he's like ... it hits him, like the wrong note hits him, and it's 'Aah - do it again, do it again', you know. And like he's playing, and it's so loud you're going 'How the hell can he hear anything?', you know, and the monitors can be really bad ...

Dweezil Zappa: Most of the time, the music that the band is trying to play is so complicated, and to hear one wrong note, out of everything that's going on stage and not, you know, I mean sometimes you don't have certain instruments up as loud as others, but he always catches that stuff ...

Ahmet Zappa: He's insane.

Dweezil Zappa: ... it's frightening, he's got the magic ears.

Narrator: Zappa finally stopped playing live in 1988. Tiring of life on the road and his bands' squabbling, he turned to business and politics. He set up his own company to trade with Eastern Europe, and a visit to post-revolutionary Prague in 1991 led to an unexpected alliance with the Czech government.

FZ: It was during my Prague visit that I was introduced to various people in the government, including Havel and various finance ministers. As a result of these meetings I proposed to them that if they needed some sort of representation in the West, to help them get investment or whatever they needed to do, that I would
be interested in doing that.

[Rostrum camera shows letter on official paper addressed to Mr Frank Zappa at the Hotel Intercontinental, Praha. The letter reads: Dear Sir, May I enturst [?] you by loading negotiations with foreign partners for preparation of preliminary projects, possibly drafts of trade agreements directed to participation of foreign firms. It concerns turist, cultural and other enterprice in Czechoslovakia. I am very obliged to you for the help offered in this respect and am looking forward to further co-operation. Very truly, [unreadable].']

The minister gave me a letter saying that I represented the government for 'trade, tourism, and culture'. Just a single, simple little letter. And so I started making phone calls to try and organise things for them. But there was a lot of behind-the-scenes back-stabbing and weird stuff going on that I wasn't aware of.

[Film shows FZ in suit and tie, apparently at a large official meeting in Czechoslovakia. He speaks to camera: "We came here today to watch Communism die."]

I've never been shy about saying what's on my mind. At this luncheon engagement with Havel, he was talking about how Dan Quayle was coming to visit them, and I expressed the opinion that I thought that it was unfortunate that a person such as President Havel should have to bear the company of somebody as stupid as Dan Quayle for even a few moments of his life. And the next thing I know, Quayle doesn't come. Instead, what's his name, James Baker III re-routes his trip to Moscow, so that he can come blasting into Prague, and literally lays down the law to the Czech government. He says you can either do business with the United States or you can do business with Zappa, what'll it be? And that was my brief but unhappy relationship with the Czech government.

Narrator: Since the announcement of his illness in 1991, Zappa has concentrated on re-mastering music from his archive, but also writing new compositions outside the rock tradition. His most recent project has been to adapt some of his computer compositions for Germany's Ensemble Modern. These were performed in Frankfurt and Vienna last September.

FZ: Well, you've gotta understand that The Yellow Shark isn't really a piece, it was just the name of the evening, it was the name of the event.

[Film of FZ supervising Ensemble Modern rehearsal. He speaks to three musicians playing a vibes or marimba: "OK, so try and keep the clusters very dense."]

It was the kind of music that the machine couldn't do. It's also the kind of music that, I would imagine, other groups couldn't play. It was pretty much designed for them.

[Film of FZ conducting Ensemble Modern rehearsal. At the hand-drop, the orchestra shouts in unison: "Aie!". FZ nods, gratified smile. "Now, you have to remember these things because they can happen any time."]

It was only interesting because the musicians themselves were interesting and their approach to music was interesting. It was something that I always hoped to encounter with

some group of musicians, somewhere, sometime.

Narrator: Despite his illness, despite no longer performing live, Zappa has lost none of his relish for experimentation. He recently held what he called a Salon at his house, where he recorded the combined sound made by the Chieftains from Ireland, a Tuvan throat singing group from Mongolia, and his old friend Johnny Guitar Watson.

[Film of the Salon. Dweezil helps FZ, seated, with his honey Strat guitar. One of the Chieftains gets up holding his bagpipes and speaks to FZ: "I tell you what would be very nice, Frank, if the boron started, and they were to start a drone, and Matt came in on the flute. How about that?" Film of the ensemble playing and everybody obviously having a good time.]

FZ: So far, let's see, in the last couple of months I've finished off three albums, so there's plenty of stuff coming out this year. The thing that we're dumping to tape right now from the hard disk is a project called Civilization Phase III, and I'm expecting to have a meeting with some people from the Vienna Opera later this month when I'm going to talk to them about mounting it as a live production. And if they decide to do it, then that will be the next major thing to occupy my time, and if not, I'll find something else.

[Film of FZ standing as he closes the Salon. Tired looking and rather slurred: "Thank you everyone, for coming to our soiree tonight, and hope to have another one, one of these days. Goodnight." Applause. FZ says individual goodbyes, hugs Johnny Guitar Watson, credits roll over A Watermelon In Easter Hay.]

Additional comments by the original author were added between brackets.

Frank Zappa

Interview in Playboy
May 2, 1993

A candid conversation with the most original mind in rock music about world affairs, Jewish princesses, fighting cancer and life beyond the fringe.

Few would doubt that Vaclav Havel, the Czech playwright-turned-politician, and Matt Groening, creator of "The Simpsons," make an odd pair. Yet in separate interviews, when asked which person had the greatest influence on their lives, both came up with the same name: Frank Zappa. "Who else?" wondered Groening. "I listened to the music, I dissected the lyrics and it transformed me."

Havel and Groening are not alone. In this years Playboy Music Poll, our readers chose Zappa as the 43rd inductee into the Playboy Music Hall of Fame, where he joins the likes of Frank Sinatra, John Lennon and Bruce Springsteen. But even before the votes had been counted, Playboy's editors had Zappa on their minds and had invited him to sit for the "Playboy Interview." The result is an unusual coincidence: For the first time in the magazine's history, an issue of Playboy both announces the Hall of Fame winner and features him in the interview.

What makes this occurrence even more unusual is that Frank Zappa is no mainstream musician. While he is lionized in Europe, his avant-garde compositions and pointed, satirical lyrics are seldom heard on America radio. As he admits, people are often confused and angered by his work. As the leader of the Mothers of Invention, one of the weirdest - and most brilliant - experimental bands ever, Zappa earned a prominent place in rock lore. He didn't do drugs, he fought censorship and he distributed a poster of himself sealed nude on a toilet, calling it "Phi Zappa Krappa." It's no wonder that the first chapter of his autobiography is tilled "How Weird Am I, Anyway?"

Over the course of his career, few were left unscathed by Zappa's wicked satire set to music. A Randy Newman with fangs, Zappa went after fashion, hypocrisy and stereotypes, managing to offend an amazing array of people. Women were incensed over the song "Titties and Beer," parents were horrified by such lyrics as "Watch out where the huskies go/and don't you eat that yellow snow" and gays were furious over "He's So Gay." The Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai B'rith denounced "Jewish Princess" ("with overworked gums, she squeaks when she comes") and demanded an apology. As always, Zappa refused.

Like his fans, his enemies could take some consolation in the fact that they weren't alone. Zappa's attacks crossed political and ideological lines; he skewered Jesse Jackson, former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, rednecks and televangelists.

His music confounded his fans, too. His range often seemed limitless, as he jumped successfully from rock to jazz to classical. He has released more than 50 albums, including "Freak Out," "Sheik Yerbouti," "Apostrophe," "200 Motels" (also the name of a film, now a cult classic) and "Jazz from Hell." His classical music has been lauded in stuffy circles, and he has released albums of his work performed by the London Symphony Orchestra. in Frankfurt, Germany, his soon-to-be-released "The Yellow Shark" was the highlight of a festival last fall, and earlier this year the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York presented "The Music of Frank Zappa" as part of its Great Performers series.

Zappa was able to make enemies even when he wasn't making music. He took on Tipper Gore and Susan Baker, wife of former Secretary of State James Baker, when they demanded that records be rated according to content - the same way movies are. Zappa testified before the Senate Commerce Committee, calling Gore, Baker and their committee "a group of bored Washington housewives" who wanted to "housebreak all composers and performers because of the lyrics of a few." He lost the crusade but remained a vigorous advocate of First Amendment rights.

He has also campaigned to encourage his audiences to vote. Voter registration booths were set up in the lobbies of the concert halls in which he performed. In his "Video from Hell" (the companion to "Jazz from Hell"), he included a note that read, "Register to vote and read the Constitution before it's void where prohibited by law. " His frustrations with government led him to consider being part of it: In 1991 he announced that he was running for president.

After some bad experiences in the record business (in the song "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," he memorialized the businessmen who screwed him), Zappa and his wife (and manager), Gail, formed their own record labels and merchandising operation. (There's even a Zappa hotline: 1-818-PUMPKIN.) His broad insight into economics and politics inspired the Financial News Network to ask him to guest-host a talk show. That gig took him to Czechoslovakia to meet with Havel, then the president, before the country split into two republics.

Zappa's music had been smuggled behind the iron curtain since the Sixties, and he had become a hero to the Czech people. His song "Plastic People" was an underground anthem. When he visited Prague, students told him that he had been considered one of the worst enemies of the Communist state. One student told of being arrested by the secret police, jailed and beaten. "We are going to beat the Zappa music out of your head," the officer screamed. Upon meeting Zappa, the boy said, "Our dream has come true today.

Havel was so enamored of him that he made Zappa the country's special ambassador to the West on trade, culture and tourism. Zappa had big plans to help bridge cultural and economic barriers with the West. The appointment, however, was derailed by Secretary of State Baker. Columnist Jack Anderson reported that Baker was "carrying an old grudge" from Zappa's dismissal of Susan Baker as a "bored housewife." "When [Baker] arrived in Prague," Anderson wrote, "he had his surrogates convey his displeasure to Havel." Havel succumbed to the pressure and canceled the appointment.

Zappa came far to have such high-placed enemies. A song called "Son of Mr. Green Genes" made people think his father was the character on "Captain Kangaroo," but in truth, he is the son of a meteorologist who did research on poison gases for the military. Gas masks hung on a wall of the family's home in case of an accident with the chemical weapons his father studied.

The family moved frequently before ending up in Lancaster, California, where Frank played drums in the school marching band. His musical taste, however, was eclectic; while his classmates swooned over Elvis, he listened to composers such as Edgard Varese and Anton Webern.

In Lancaster, Zappa formed his first garage band, the Black-Outs (so named after the night some of his bandmates drank too much peppermint schnapps and blacked out). He later joined the Soul Giants, which became the Mothers of Invention. With Zappa as their guitar-wielding leader, the Mothers were known for their excellent and innovative music - "Uncle Meat," "Weasels Ripped My Flesh" and "The Grand Wazoo" are classic albums - and for their antics. One of the more colorful rock legends maintains that Zappa and Alice Cooper had a gross-out contest onstage: After Cooper allegedly squashed some live baby chicks, Zappa supposedly picked up a plastic spoon and ate a plate of steaming feces. Although Zappa denies it, he's been haunted by the story for years.

While his reputation for weirdness is his trademark, his private life seems eminently sane. Now 52, he has been married to Gail for 25 years and is a devoted father to his four children - Moon Unit, 25 (she was the voice of the obnoxious "Valley Girl" in his 1982 hit song), Dweezil, 23, Ahmet, 18, and Diva, 13. It was Moon and Dweezil who shocked their father's fans in November 1991 when they announced that he had been diagnosed with prostate cancer. The illness forced him to drop his planned presidential campaign, and both work and travel have been disrupted. His "Playboy Interview," was conducted by Contributing Editor David Sheff, who most recently chatted with Steve Martin for the January 1993 interview. Sheff reports:

"The Zappa home is a mock-Tudor Pee-wee's Playhouse in fast-forward mode. In one room, a state-of-the-art recording studio, engineers work on computers and recording equipment, and in another room, editors pore over frames of videotape. Various assistants dash through halls decorated with memorabilia such as gold records and Zappa license plates. On one wall is a poster of Ronald Reagan as Adolf Hitler.

"I waited for Zappa in a wood-paneled room on a comfortable old couch opposite a redbrick fireplace. When Frank came in, he attempted to sit comfortably in a large purple leather chair. But comfort was impossible - Zappa explained that the pain had invaded his lower back.

"The interview was interrupted briefly by assistants bringing coffee or Frank's dinner, a bagel and cream cheese. Gail sleepily stopped in to say hello; she was exhausted after an all-night flight from Tokyo, where she had gone with Diva and Moon Unit to see Dweezil play guitar with a Japanese pop star. Later, Diva came in, flopped on her dad's lap and gave him a big kiss, telling him how much she had missed him.

"Zappa, with his trademark mustache and sideburns, chain-smoked while he spoke with unmistakable passion, and urgency, about his music, his politics, his family and his illness. Occasionally, pain overcame him and he stopped speaking. I asked if he wanted to take a break and resume later. degrees No,' he said, degrees let's keep going.'

"We finished after seven straight hours and as we wound up, I fell both inspired and deeply saddened. I thanked him and told him it was a good interview. He said, degrees As long as it goes beyond the fringe.'"

Playboy: You once said that your job is "extrapolating everything to its most absurd extreme." Does that still hold true

Frank Zappa: It's one of my jobs. I guess it must have been my main job that day. But yes, I like carrying things to their most ridiculous extreme because out there on the fringe is where my type of entertainment lies.

Playboy: Is it frustrating that more people don't get it?

Frank Zappa: The crux of the biscuit is: If it entertains you, fine. Enjoy it. If it doesn't, then blow it out your ass. I do it to amuse myself. If I like it, I release it. If somebody else likes it, that's a bonus.

Playboy: How important is it to offend people?

Frank Zappa: You mean, do I wake up and say, "I think I'll go out and offend somebody today"? I don't do that. I don't write lyrics much anymore, but I offend people just as much with the music itself. I put chords together that I like, but many people want rhythms that they can march to or dance to; they get tangled up trying to tap their foot to my songs. Some people don't like that, which is OK with me.

Playboy: You certainly offended people with the Phi Zappa Krappa poster.

Frank Zappa: Probably. But so what?

Playboy: And some of your antics from the Mothers of Invention days, like the famed gross-out contest.

Frank Zappa: There never was a gross-out contest. That was a rumor. Somebody's imagination ran wild. Chemically bonded imagination. The rumor was that I went so far as

to eat shit onstage. There were people who were terribly disappointed that I never ate shit onstage. But no, there never was anything resembling a gross-out contest.
Playboy: Another rumor was that you peed on an audience.
Frank Zappa: I never had my dick out onstage and neither did anybody else in the band. We did have a stuffed giraffe rigged with a hose and an industrial-strength whipped cream dispenser. Under it we had a cherry bomb. That's how we celebrated the Fourth of July in 1967. Somebody waved the flag, lit the cherry bomb. It blew the ass out of the giraffe. Another guy reached behind the giraffe and pushed the button and had this thing shitting whipped cream all over the stage. That amused people for some reason.
Playboy: So it was simply contained outrageousness?
Frank Zappa: Stagecraft.
Playboy: To entertain or just to alleviate boredom?
Frank Zappa: There was a third factor, too. There's an art statement in whipped cream shooting out the ass of a giraffe, isn't there? We were carrying on the forgotten tradition of dada stagecraft. The more absurd, the better I liked it.
Playboy: The titles of your records and songs are art statements, too.
Frank Zappa: Well, you have to call them something, so why not call them something amusing?
Playboy: For example, Burnt Weeny Sandwich?
Frank Zappa: I still eat burnt weeny sandwiches. It's one of the great things in life. At least it's a great lunch. You take a Hebrew National, put it on a fork, burn it on the stove, wrap two pieces of bread around it, squirt some mustard on it, eat it and you're back to work.
Playboy: You've also used your songs to level political attacks. You wrote Rhymin' Man about Jesse Jackson. What made you so angry?
Frank Zappa: An article raised some questions about whether or not Martin Luther King actually died in Jesse's arms. There were reports that Jackson dipped his hands into King's blood or even used chicken blood and rubbed it on his shirt, which we wore for a few days afterward as he met the media. So I did this song about the idea of communicating through nursery rhymes, as Jackson is prone to do. It rubs me the wrong way. I'm not saying that all of Jesse's ideas are bad; I agree with some of them. But I'm not confident that Jesse Jackson would be the person I would look to to implement any of them. I don't want to see any religious people in public office because they're working for another boss.
Playboy: You also assailed former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop in a song.
Frank Zappa: HBO ran something like "Dr. Koop Answers Your Questions About AIDS." On it, I saw him explain how AIDS got from the green monkey to the human population. He speculated about a native who wanted to eat a green monkey, who skinned it, cut his finger and some of the green monkey's blood got into his blood. The next thing you know, you have this blood-to-blood transmission of the disease. I mean, this is awful fucking thin. It's right up there with Grimm's Fairy Tales. And Koop was such a cartoon character with that uniform and everything. Before Ronald Reagan, when did you ever see a surgeon general dressed up like the guy in the Katzenjammer Kids?
Playboy: Because of songs such as Dinah Moe Humm ("I got a forty-dollar bill say you can't make me come"), He's So Gay and many others, you have been accused of being sexist, misogynistic and homophobic.
Frank Zappa: Some people miss the joke. In general, I was a convenient enemy and they could get exposure for their causes by coming after me. But I'm not antigay. When Ross Perot announced he was running for president, I wanted him to choose Barney Frank as a vice-presidential candidate. He is one of the most impressive guys in Congress. He is a great model for young gay men.
Playboy: But you were criticized for Bobby Brown Goes Down and He's So Gay.

Frank Zappa: But see, I'm a journalist of a sort. I have a right to say what I want to say about any topic. If you don't have a sense of humor, then tough titties.
Playboy: is that what you said when you were attacked by the Anti-Defamation League for Jewish Princess?
Frank Zappa: They wanted to convince the world that there's no such thing as a Jewish princess, but, I'm sorry, the facts speak for themselves. They asked me to apologize and I refused. I still have their letter nailed to the wall. They got a lot of mileage out of it, but it was a tempest in a teapot. They just wanted to give the impression that here, in the world of rock, was this rabid anti-Semite who was besmirching the fine reputation of everybody of the Jewish faith. Well, I didn't make up the idea of a Jewish princess. They exist, so I wrote a song about them. If they don't like it, so what? Italians have princesses, too.
Playboy: Is there rhyme or reason behind the subjects you choose to attack?
Frank Zappa: Whatever I'm mad at at the time. I like things that work. If something doesn't, the first question you have to ask is, Why? if it's not working and you know why, then you have to ask, "Why isn't somebody doing something about it?" The government, for starters. Most institutions. The nation's education system is completely fucked up.
Playboy: Fucked up how?
Frank Zappa: The schools are worthless because the books are worthless. They still are on the level of George Washington and the cherry tree and "I cannot tell a lie." The books have all been bowdlerized by committees responding to pressure from right-wing groups to make every aspect of the history books consistent with the cryptofascist view-point. When you send your kids to school, that's what they're dealing with. Your children are being presented with these documents, part of a multibillion-dollar industry, which are absolutely fraudulent. Kids' heads are crammed with so many nonfacts that when they get out of school they're totally unprepared to do anything. They can't read, they can't write, they can't think. Talk about child abuse. The U.S. school system as a whole qualifies.
Playboy: Did you find alternative schools for your kids?
Frank Zappa: In California you can take your kids out of school at 15 if they can pass the equivalency test, so the first three have escaped. Diva still has a couple of years to go.
Playboy: Before they escaped, how did you deal with it?
Frank Zappa: We had them in public school and private school, back and forth, trying to find the best possible education that we could get for them.
Playboy: Regardless of what they learned at school, they certainly must get an education around here.
Frank Zappa: There definitely is a little stimulation around here. They meet a lot of people from all over the world and of all different nationalities and races and business backgrounds. The kids aren't shoveled into a room.
Playboy: Did the perspective you gave them prepare them for those bad schools?
Frank Zappa: It caused them trouble, because when they compared what qualifies as the real world here in this house with what they experienced as the real world in school, it was very different. Sometimes their friends think they're weird. On the other hand, their friends like to spend the night over here.
Playboy: Were the teachers horrified?
Frank Zappa: Some of them. They had a few teachers who were great. One could have taught a couch to read. She was fired because she wasn't Mexican. The school had an ethnic quota, and she was out.
Playboy: If Tipper Gore was right and exposure to an uncensored world is bad for kids, your kids must be monsters.
Frank Zappa: My kids do OK. I like them a lot and they seem to like me and their mother. They don't use drugs. They don't drink. They don't even eat meat.
Playboy: What have you said to your kids about drugs?

Frank Zappa: All I told them was, "You see examples of drug-crazed people on television and all you have to do is look at those assholes." They get the point. The biggest thing you can do for kids is give them the ability to figure things out. I use a risk-reward program. One of my kids comes to me and tells me he or she wants to do something. I say no if I don't think it's a good idea. If they can convince me, logically, that I'm wrong, they get to do it.
Playboy: You're creating your worst nightmare: a house full of lawyers.
Frank Zappa: I don't think we have to worry about any of them becoming lawyers. But it does help to develop reasoning and communication skills - you might even call it sales skills - to manage to get your way in a fast and efficient manner. I don't think it hurts. Look at the alternative: They could go "Wah-wah-wah" or break things, or sneak. We don't have very much in the way of tantrums or sneakage problems. I look at kids as little people. The little people have certain assets and liabilities. They're born with an unbound imagination. They're born without fear and prejudice. On the other hand, they don't have the mechanical skills to do big-person stuff. But if you treat them like people, they'll learn. If you think of them as your precious little commodities and you want to mold them and shape them into something that you imagine for them, it breeds problems.
Playboy: You obviously don't buy the argument that you have to give your kids something to rebel against.
Frank Zappa: Well, my children certainly have decided not to grow up like me. They don't smoke. They don't eat hamburgers or bacon. They find their own way. I just want to keep them out of trouble and make sure that they can get to adulthood with some sort of marketable skill and a chance for a happy life on their own terms. I don't want them to be like me or like Gail. They should be like them. And they should be as well equipped to be themselves as possible. As parents we have to do everything to give them the equipment to be themselves, so that when they go out into the world they can maintain their identity and still survive.
Playboy: Would they have been different had you named them Sally or John?
Frank Zappa: It's the last name that gets them into trouble.
Playboy: How?
Frank Zappa: I'm viewed as being weird. When somebody calls you weird, then anything you touch becomes weird. On the other hand, they like being weird.
Playboy: And their first names distinguish them for anyone unconvinced by their last name?
Frank Zappa: I want them to be different. I know that the people in these schools will never be different because they're afraid to be different. But my kids are genetically different, so they might as well be different all the way.
Playboy: Chastity Bono once told a reporter how terrible her name is. She said when she complained, Sonny reminded her, "Be thankful we didn't name you Dweezil." Have any of your kids threatened to change their names?
Frank Zappa: No. I think they like them, though you'd have to ask them. We all get along well. That seems to be a rare thing in a family today. The family itself is a vanishing artifact. In the Nineties, if you have a family and the people inside the family have affection for one another, it's kind of a miracle. It's mutant behavior. I mean, they yell and scream at one another like any other kids. But most of the time they play together.
Playboy: How did you meet Gail?
Frank Zappa: She was working at the Whiskey a-Go-Go in L.A. I fell in love with her instantly.
Playboy: Is it true you didn't give her a wedding ring;
Frank Zappa: I didn't have one, so when we got married, I pinned a ballpoint pen on her dress. It was a maternity dress because she was nine months pregnant.

Playboy: These days, particularly in your profession, twenty-five-year marriages are uncommon. Why has yours lasted?
Frank Zappa: We both are busy with what we care about. She's good at what she does, and I leave her alone when it comes to that. I spent so much time on the road that we were always glad to see each other when the tours were over. The other thing is I guess we like each other.
Playboy: Is there a lot of music in your house? What music do your kids listen to?
Frank Zappa: When Ahmet was in sixth grade, he liked Fiddler on the Roof and Oliver! Recently he discovered Hoagy Carmichael and Johnny Mercer. Diva likes rap music of all languages. Moon likes dance-oriented stuff. Dweezil likes anything with a guitar in it.
Playboy: How do you like his music?
Frank Zappa: The best of it, I think, is his instrumental music, which is very involved technically; the rhythms and intervals are complicated and his execution is spotless.
Playboy: How about you? Have you lost your interest in rock and roll?
Frank Zappa: My main interest is composition - getting an idea and manifesting it in a way that people can listen to.
Playboy: How much has technology changed your music?
Frank Zappa: Without the computer I would still be at the mercy of musicians to play my music. I would also be at the mercy of governmental and civic entities that fund performances.
Playboy: After your last tour, you said you wouldn't be touring again.
Frank Zappa: Well, I couldn't afford it. I lost \$ 400,000 on it and I don't wish to experience that again.
Playboy: Do you ever miss the -
Frank Zappa: Rock-and-roll life? No.
Playboy: How about the experience of the performance?
Frank Zappa: A little bit. Every once in a while I, feel like playing the guitar, but I stop and think what I'd have to go through in order to do it. The urge goes away.
Playboy: Is it particularly gratifying to get commissions such as the one from the Frankfurt Festival last year?
Frank Zappa: That one was really something. It was a whole evening of my music, which was part of a whole week of my music, new pieces and old. It was performed in Frankfurt, Berlin and Vienna.
Playboy: Do you have any theories about why your music has been more popular in Europe than in America?
Frank Zappa: Germans, in particular, have a history of supporting new composition. They also have a viable contemporary tradition of new music that gets funded and performed regularly.
Playboy: Was it always your goal to do classical music?
Frank Zappa: That's where I started. I didn't write rock and roll until I was in my twenties, but I started writing other kinds of music. I couldn't play it, I could only write it.
Playboy: Where did the interest come from?
Frank Zappa: I liked the way music looked on paper. It was fascinating to me that you could see the notes and somebody. who knew what they were doing would look at them and music would come out. I thought it was a miracle. I was always interested in graphics, and I spent most of my creative time in my early days in school drawing pictures. I got a Speedball pen and a jar of Higgins India ink and some music paper and, shit, I could draw those.
Playboy: It was originally about a picture, not a sound?
Frank Zappa: Yes. And then I got someone to play it. I went to my grandmother's funeral when I was little and I sat there looking at the candles. The choir was singing, and when they would sing a note, the candles would respond to it. I didn't know why. I was a little kid;

what the fuck did I know about physics? But it was a physical manifestation of a sound. I remembered it; I put it in the memory bank to see what I could do with it later. It shows how bored I was at the funeral.
Playboy: Did your parents play music,
Frank Zappa: No. We had a very unmusical household.
Playboy: Your father worked with poison gas for a living. Did you understand the implications of that?
Frank Zappa: Yeah. I just took it as a fact of life. We lived in a place where we were obliged to have gas masks hanging on the wall in case the tanks broke, because you could die. Thinking back on it, if those tanks had broken, those gas masks wouldn't have saved us.
Playboy: How close were the tanks?
Frank Zappa: There were tanks of mustard gas next to the Army housing we lived in. We were right down the street from this shit. We had a rack in the hall, with Daddy's mask, Momma's mask and Frank's mask hanging on it. I used to wear mine all the time. It was my space helmet. There was a can at the end of the hose that had the filtration unit in it, and I always wondered what was in it. I took a can opener and unscrewed it to find out how it worked. My father got very upset when I opened it up because I broke it and he would have to get me another one, which he never did. I was defenseless.
Playboy: Were your parents religious,
Frank Zappa: Pretty religious.
Playboy: Church and confession?
Frank Zappa: Oh, yeah. They used to make me go. They tried to make me go to Catholic school, too. I lasted a very short time. When the penguin came after me with a ruler, I was out of there.
Playboy: So you were headstrong.
Frank Zappa: Yeah. I still went to church regularly, though, until I was eighteen years old. Then suddenly, the light bulb went on over my head. All the mindless mobidity and discipline was pretty sick - bleeding this, painful that and no meat on Friday. What is this shit?
Playboy: Is the irreverence and outrageousness in your music a reaction to being a good Catholic boy?
Frank Zappa: Well, I think it was possible to do what I've done only because I escaped the bondage of being a devout believer. To be a good member of the congregation, ultimately you have to stop thinking. The essence of Christianity is told to us in the Garden of Eden story. The fruit that was forbidden was on the tree of knowledge. The subtext is, All the suffering you have is because you wanted to find out what was going on. You could still be in the Garden of Eden if you had just kept your fucking mouth shut and hadn't asked any questions.
Playboy: Did the end of your religiousness coincide with your step into rock and roll?
Frank Zappa: It was right about the same time. I was pretty isolated. There weren't any cultural opportunities in Lancaster. You couldn't just go to a concert. There was nothing.
Playboy: Were you tempted by drugs?
Frank Zappa: All you'd have to do was look at the people who used them and that was enough. People would do frightening things and think it was fantastic. Then they would discuss it endlessly with the next guy, who had taken the same drug. I tried marijuana and waited for something to happen. I got a sore throat and it made me sleepy. I'd look at them and go, "Why?" I'm not going to be Bill Clinton and say I never inhaled. I did inhale. I couldn't understand what the big attraction was. I liked tobacco a lot better.
Playboy: Were you involved in other aspects of the counterculture?

Frank Zappa: In order to be a part of it, you had to buy into the whole drug package. You had to have been experienced, in the Jimi Hendrix sense of the word. And all the people I knew who had been experienced were on the cusp of being zombies.
Playboy: Was it disconcerting that your audiences were high much of the time?
Frank Zappa: The worst part of it for me was that I really didn't like the smell of marijuana. I had to go into a place that had the purple haze and work for a couple of hours in that. They were entitled to do whatever they wanted, so long as they didn't drive into me under the influence of it.
Playboy: But you told people drugs were stupid, before Nancy Reagan did.
Frank Zappa: One of the reasons we weren't rabidly popular at that time was that I said what was on my mind about drugs.
Playboy: Did you feel like an outsider? It's safe to say that every other major rock star in those days was
Frank Zappa: Looped. It wasn't just the other musicians but the people in the band. The guys in the band who wished they could do drugs couldn't because it meant unemployment. I was unpopular for it. As for the rock stars, if you've met them, you know that they generally have very little on their minds. I never had any great desire to hang out with them.
Playboy: Did any of the big acts of the time interest you? How about Dylan, Hendrix, the Stones?
Frank Zappa: Some of the really good things that Hendrix did was the earliest stuff, when he was just ripping and brutal. Manic Depression was my favorite Jimi Hendrix song. The more experimental it got, the less interesting and the thinner it got. As for Dylan, Highway 61 Revisited was really good. Then we got Blonde on Blonde and it started to sound like cowboy music, and you know what I think of cowboy music. I liked the Rolling Stones.
Playboy: Did Mick Jagger once pull a splinter out of your toe?
Frank Zappa: Yeah. He came by my house and I was hopping around because of this splinter, so he pulled it out. Good story, huh? I did like his attitude and the Stones' attitude. Ultimately, though, the music was being done because it was product. It was pop music made because there was a record company waiting for records.
Playboy: Is that why you founded Straight Records?
Frank Zappa: I naively thought that if there was some venue for nonstandard material, the material would find a market. But it failed because it was independent and had in dependent distribution. We lost our butt on that one. So the only way you can really do an independent label is to distribute through a major that has some clout to collect from the retailers.
Playboy: How are your current labels, Barking Pumpkin and Zappa Records, doing?
Frank Zappa: We have a very loyal fan base in several countries. Although the sales figures worldwide aren't anywhere near what the big rock stars would do if they released an album, the people who like what we do are very enthusiastic about it. That gives you a certain amount of leverage with record companies. You hook up with a major distributor but still control what you do. Since I have a record company of my own that controls the masters, the amount I make per unit - as the record company as opposed to the artist - is substantially more. I can sell three units and stay in business.
Playboy: What inspired you to form your first band, the Black-Outs?
Frank Zappa: In Lancaster there wasn't any rock and roll, unless you listened to it on a record. Most of the people who liked R\&B were not the white sons and daughters of the alfalfa farmers or defense workers who lived there. There were a number of Mexicans and a lot of black kids, and they liked that kind of stuff. So I put together this racially mixed ensemble that liked to play that kind of music. We banged our heads against the wall just like every other garage band, trying to figure out how to play, it. There's no guidebook.
Playboy: Were you playing high school dances?

Frank Zappa: No, they wouldn't let us. I had to mount my own events. One time we rented the Lancaster Women's Club to put on a dance. When the authorities heard that there was going to be this rock-and-roll dance in their little cowboy community, they arrested me at six that evening for vagrancy. I spent the night in jail. it was right out of a teenage movie. But the dance went off anyway.
Playboy: Did that group metamorphose into the Mothers of Invention?
Frank Zappa: That was just a high school band. After I got out of high school and moved away, I played other kinds of gigs, like a short stint with Joe Perrino and the Mellotones. We are allowed to play one twist number per night. The rest was Happy Birthday, Anniversary Waltz and all the standards. I wore a little tux and strummed chords, bored. I got sick of that and stuck my guitar in the case and put it behind the sofa and left it there for eight months. I got a job doing greeting card designs, and for fun I wrote chamber music. I ran into some people who knew a guy named Paul Buff who had a studio. I started doing some worker over there. I met Ray Collins, who was working weekend gigs with the Soul Giants. He got into a fistfight with the guitar player. They needed a substitute guitar player in a hurry, so he called me. I got really involved and learned how hard it is to run a band, especially if you are trying to put together some nonstandard musical offering with no money. You try to convince a musician that it is a worth-while thing to do, when deep in his heart every rock musician thinks that he, too, should be the fourth member of Cream or the eighteenth Beatle. That group of people became the Mothers, anyway.
Playboy: So named because?
Frank Zappa: I don't know. We chose the name on Mother's Day.
Playboy: Do you look at those as the good old days?
Frank Zappa: I look at those as the old days. But we did have fun.
Playboy: What was the music scene like?
Frank Zappa: Pretty bizarre. it was the days of all these Sixties bands, including Jefferson Airplane and Paul Butterfield and Johnny Rivers. We opened for Lenny Bruce at the Fillmore West in 1966. I asked him to sign my draft card, but he said no.
Playboy: Is that when you had your run-in with John Wayne?
Frank Zappa: Yeah. He came to one show very drunk. He saw me and picked me up and said, "I saw you in Egypt and you were great . . . and then you blew me!" Onstage I said, "Ladies and gentlemen, it's Halloween and we were going to have some important guests here tonight - like George Lincoln Rockwell, head of the American Nazi Party - but unfortunately all we could get was John Wayne." He got up and made some drunken speech, and his bodyguards told me I'd better cool it.
Playboy: There were other characters - such as Cynthia Plaster-Caster. Tell us about her.
Frank Zappa: Eric Clapton introduced me to the Plaster-Casters. They had all these statues of the dicks of people like Jimi Hendrix. One of them mixed the plaster stuff to make a mold, and the other gave the guy a blow job. She took her mouth off the guy's dick, and then the other one slammed the mold onto it. We declined to be enshrined, so to speak.
Playboy: During those years, the Mothers were famous for being a hardworking band. You were on the road all the time.
Frank Zappa: We played everywhere. Like the time we spent in Montreal, when we played a club called the New Penelope and it was twenty degrees below zero. We walked from our hotel to the club, and the snot had literally frozen in our noses by the time we got to work. The wind instruments got so cold that if you tried to play them, your lips and fingers would freeze to them. The instruments couldn't even be played until they were warmed up. It was pretty primitive. If we hadn't experienced that, we probably wouldn't have come up with some of the more deranged types of audience participation and audience punishment things that we were doing at the time.
Playboy: Audience punishment things?

Frank Zappa: The question became, How far would they go? What could we get an audience to do? The answer seemed to be anything. We'd bring someone up and go, "Take your shoes and socks off, put your socks on your hands and lick them while we play." Anything we could think of. So long as the person telling them to do it was onstage, they would do it. The rest of the people in the audience were laughing at the person who was doing the most ridiculous things but saying at the same time, I could do that! That could be me!" At a theater in New York, which had once been a porno theater or something, there was a projection booth at the far end of the stage. We ran a wire from there to the opposite side of the stage. We had pulleys on it. Our drummer, Motorhead, was instructed to attach objects to the line at random times during the show and fly them down. When they would land onstage, whatever arrived, we would improvise on it. Once, he sent down a baby d4" a doggie-style position with its head removed. It flew over the audience, whizzing by like in apparition over their heads, and crashed into the post over us. It was followed shortly by a three-foot-long Genoa salami that sodomized the doll. It seemed to me that there was no reason to waste this perfectly good salami, so I invited this lovely girl with very long hair, wearing a kind of Little Miss Muffet costume, to come up onstage and eat the whole salami. We played and she ate the salami. She started to cry because she couldn't finish it. I told her it was OK, that we would save it for her and she could come back and eat the rest of it. She did.
Playboy: Do you keep up with popular music now?
Frank Zappa: What's to keep up with? If anything's sensational, it won't be on MTV, it'll be Sister Souljah on Larry King.
Playboy: You had your own talk show on FNN for a short time. What started that brief career?
Frank Zappa: I was invited to be a guest on Bob Berkowitz' show to talk about business opportunities in the Soviet Union, which I knew something about from my travels there. It was a fairly amusing half hour. After that, Bob asked me to guest-host his show while he was on vacation.
Playboy: You tried to book Czechoslovakia's president Vaclav Havel as a guest, right?
Frank Zappa: I knew a guy who had been a rock-and-roll musician who, after the revolution, was a ranking member of the Czech parliament. I asked him whether or not he could arrange for me to meet Havel so that I could interview him about the country's economy for FNN. I met with Havel and found that the minute I started talking with him about economics, he turned me over to his advisors; he didn't know anything about it. We didn't do the interview, but it was great meeting with him.
Playboy: Why Havel
Frank Zappa: I happen to think that the Velvet Revolution was a little bit of a miracle. Since he was kind of the focal point of the whole thing, I thought he'd be a nice guy to talk with. He was. In the middle of everything, he mentioned that Dan Quayle was coming to visit. I expressed my condolences. I told him I was sorry that he was going to be forced to have a conversation with anyone that stupid. It eventually must have gotten back to the U.S. embassy. Instead of sending Quayle, Jim Baker - who was on his way to Moscow - rerouted his trip and went to Prague.
Playboy: What do you think of the breakup of Czechoslovakia?
Frank Zappa: It's a big mistake. The crash program for economic reform is part of what led to the breakup of the country. Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus, who was the advocate of the fast economic reform a la Poland, is a person who is well respected by Western financial people because he talks their language. This has a tendency to assure potential Western backers, who are not comfortable with a guy who wants to go slowly. But there. are factors that make it necessary to go slowly. Now there is no intellectual core in charge of the revolution, and the country has divided up, which is a mistake. Smaller entities tend to be less efficient; every small country has to reinvent the wheel. They have to set up a new

constitution, a legislature, currency. It's happening in every one of the small breakaway republics. It gives the people personal gratification as a nationality, but the price is chaos.
Playboy: But you're all for smaller governments and more local control, aren't you?
Frank Zappa: No, because that means more governments.
Playboy: But smaller governments might better reflect their constituents.
Frank Zappa: That's a reasonable assumption, if it were all going to work fairly. But I think that behind each breakaway movement is a breakaway demagogue who will set up his breakaway demagogue government. In many breakaway countries the governments now say, on paper, that you are free to be an entrepreneur. Well, that's great if you have cash to invest. But who has the cash? The party bosses who were there before are the new entrepreneurs. Guys who got thrown out of office wound up buying restaurants, hotels or factories. The drones who were wandering around the streets are still wandering, even though they have the right to be entrepreneurs. That's certainly true in Russia, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. I haven't been to Poland yet.
Playboy: Was it surprising that you had fans behind the iron curtain?
Frank Zappa: Yeah, and lots of people who didn't like me - like the secret police.
Playboy: What did the secret police have against you?
Frank Zappa: In Prague, I was told that the biggest enemies of the Communist Czech state were Jimmy Carter and me. A student I met said that he was arrested by the secret police and beaten. They said they were going to beat the Zappa music out of him.
Playboy: How did Czechs know about your music?
Frank Zappa: It had been slipping in there since 1966 or 1967. The first album that was really popular there was Absolutely Free, the one with Plastic People on it. In Moscow, I was in the Ministry of Culture and met a young guy with a big Communist pin on his chest who said that he had earned his way through school bootlegging my tapes in from Yugoslavia.
Playboy: Were you glued to your TV set when the Berlin Wall came down and the rest of the U.S.S.R. unraveled?
Frank Zappa: Yeah, and I was thrilled, even though I'm pretty disappointed by what's happened since then. See, in that part of the world, the average guy in the street is like the average guy in the street anyplace else. He has the same desires. He wants something to eat, a roof over his head. He doesn't want to freeze, he wants to get laid, he wants to have a long and happy life reasonably free of pain. If he has a trade or a craft, he wants to be able to do his job. Unfortunately, these normal people are represented by bad people, just like here. But they want what we want. The average guy there is just like us, Joe Six-pack, except his beer tastes better.
Playboy: How do you feel about America's reaction to the changes in the former Soviet Union?
Frank Zappa: It's underwhelming. I would call it reactionary.
Playboy: What would you have the United States do?
Frank Zappa: If you really believed that the major threat to the universe was communism, the minute you saw it crumbling, wouldn't you do everything you could to make sure it never came back? To make sure that the people in that part of the world have a chance to participate in something better, so they aren't tempted to vote communism back in? That's a real danger in these countries. Now that they have free elections, so long as there is any remnant of a Communist Party, even if they call it something else, it could easily be voted back in because their economy is in such bad shape. They don't need a tank or a gun to regain control, they just need a ballot box.
Playboy: You planned to become involved in Russian businesses. What happened to the company you founded to do it?
Frank Zappa: Since I got sick, nothing happened. The idea was that there are a lot of small-to medium-sized U.S. companies that would like to have access to raw materials,

patents, processes or other things they don't know about that exist in Russia or other countries. A nation that plays chess that well, and where you can still get 15,000 people to show up to hear somebody read poetry, has something going for, it. There's a brain at work there. I suspect that because of their economic condition they've found was to use string, chewing gum, reprocessed turnips - whatever they use - to do things in a way that we haven't thought of. Somebody needs to go snooping around to find out what's there and try to put those people together with American investors. It would help both countries. That's what I was going to do. It was a better solution than having the Russian scientists flock out of there to get jobs making weapons for the Arabs or the Indians.
Playboy: Sometimes you sound like a political candidate. How serious was your plan to run for president?
Frank Zappa: I wanted to do it. It's a bit hard to mount a campaign if you have cancer and don't feel well.
Playboy: If you hadn't been ill, would you have run?
Frank Zappa: Yeah. And it's a shame. We got calls and mail throughout the election. Squadrons of volunteers called.
Playboy: If you had run and won, what would President Zappa have done?
Frank Zappa: I would have started by dismantling the government. At least I would have presented the idea to the voters.
Playboy: Nothing too revolutionary?
Frank Zappa: In the Beltway and places that have large federal payrolls, the idea wouldn't be too popular, but in other places people would think it's great. One strong selling point is that you could do away with federal income taxes, or at least reduce them to a point that people would have something left at the end of the week. In the end, I think people, in their enlightened self-interest, would consider voting for that.
Playboy: If you dismantled the government, you'd put yourself out of a job.
Frank Zappa: No, because most reasonable people would agree that we need roads, for instance, and water you can drink and breathable air. Most people realize that there has to be some coordinated infrastructure and a national offense that is commensurate with whatever threat you feel from other countries.
Playboy: National offense?
Frank Zappa: I mean - well, what we have now is national offense. We should have national defense.
Playboy: You've said that you're not a peacenik.
Frank Zappa: Human nature and human stupidity often breed violence. When violence escalates to an international confrontation, you should be able to protect yourself. On the other hand, to plan for it - like we did throughout the Cold War - based on badly handled intelligence estimates of the threat to our national security is just stupid. Most intelligence estimates indicated that the Soviet couldn't do shit to us, but they were ignored order to maintain the level of employment and financial activity in the defense industry.
Playboy: Do you think that our recent election was irrelevant?
Frank Zappa: Yes, because America has to be completely restructured. We have to question every institution in terms of efficiency. I'm serious about abandoning the federal system.
Playboy: Is there any way that it's likely to happen?
Frank Zappa: Not this week, but I wish people would at least consider it. They think, There it is, we're stuck with it, it will go on forever. It doesn't have to. The Soviet Union didn't go on forever. If you want reform, the people who've been doing a bad job have to get fired. They have to go back to the used-car lot from where they came.
Playboy: Yet you've always pushed people to vote. Why bother?
Frank Zappa: Even if you don't like the candidates, there are issues that affect your life. Bond issues affect your pocketbook. That's the only real reason for voting. As far as the

rest of government is concerned, forget it. The amount of overstaffing, overlapping, wasted energy and pompous pseudograndeur is science fiction. All of it is supported by this universe of political talk shows. CNN is one of the worst offenders on the planet. It maintains the fiction of the theoretical value of the thoughts and words of these inferior human specimens who manage to become Beltway insiders.
Playboy: Do you want to name names?
Frank Zappa: Do we need to see John Sununu as a talk-show guy? Or, on CNBC, Gordon Liddy or Oliver North? Let's face it: Some of these people are criminals. Why do we need to be presented with them as voices of authority whose opinions are something we should even waste our time with? Why?
Playboy: What do you think is behind it?
Frank Zappa: It's a whole program designed to modify behavior and modify thinking on a national level. They're happy to take the slings and arrows of the outraged minority in order to keep these voices of stupidity in your face all the time. It's all propaganda.
Playboy: How planned is it?
Frank Zappa: Completely. It is the residue of the domestic-diplomacy department that Reagan established during the Iran/Contra days. The idea was to control the news. From that office, a guy would make phone calls and certain journalists would get fired and news stories would get changed. Then it was the obvious control of the media we saw during the Gulf war.
Playboy: So you maintain that the media are no more than pawns?
Frank Zappa: The media are part of the package. You think really liberal people own those outlets? I don't. Even if they were Democrats, it wouldn't mean anything, because who can tell the difference between those two criminal classes?
Playboy: it sounds as if you are as cynical as ever.
Frank Zappa: It's hard not to be.
Playboy: Yet you feel it's worthwhile to raise some hell?
Frank Zappa: Pessimism and the natural instinct to raise hell are not mutually exclusive. Raising hell comes naturally to me. Still, I am not optimistic about what will happen to this country unless some radical change is made. It's going to take more than just firing a few bad guys.
Playboy: You were involved in politics firsthand when you tried to stop record companies from being forced to label records, much like movies are rated. Your opponents got their way. Has it had any impact?
Frank Zappa: A chilling impact.
Playboy: How? Don't you think that the warning stickers help sales? Kids want stuff with bad words.
Frank Zappa: But groups that are getting signed to recording contracts are being told what they can and cannot sing.
Playboy: That doesn't ring true, It seems that there is less censorship than ever. "Motherfucker" is almost requisite to rap songs. in heavy metal, Axl Rose screams, "Suck my fucking dick!" What's being censored?
Frank Zappa: If it's some guy selling thirty million records, the record company isn't going in with scissors. But the new bands just signing up have no leverage. They do what they are told.
Playboy: Many of the rap artists aren't selling millions.
Frank Zappa: But they're on shaky ground. Time Warner was ready to succumb to the protests over Cop Killer before Ice-T backed off. It's all hanging on a cliff, ready to go over. More frightening is the Child Protection Act. It holds people responsible if they in any way influence someone to commit a crime. The record companies are worried.
Playboy: You obviously don't believe songs can make people kill or rape or commit suicide.

Frank Zappa: There are more love songs than anything else. If songs could make you do something, we'd all love one another. Violence in songs functions the same way violence in movies does. In Lethal Weapon, people get blown up, mashed and mutilated. The people in the audience would never do anything like that.
Playboy: Have you been censored?
Frank Zappa: No. I do what I want to do, though there are certain socially retarded areas where my records are not to be seen. That's one of the reasons we have a mail-order business. There's this ludicrous fear of the power of music manifesting itself in the corruption of the youth of America. It's idiotic. But censorship, in effect, is turning the United States into a police state, as far as ideas go. It's not about children learning dirty words. It's about putting a lid on ideas. Whatever they don't want to confront, whether it's about sex or racism or anything else, is what they want to censor. One way to shut off the avenues of dissent is to put a lid on rock and roll. Then come books and everything else. But censorship is communism. Why are we buying into communist suppression at a time when everybody else in the world has realized that it doesn't work? The people who want to censor do not care about saving your children. They care about one thing - getting reelected. Let's face it, folks: Politicians in the United States are the scum of the earth. We have to go after them individually because they're varmints. The legislation they are passing, piece by piece, converts America into a police state. The mentality that has existed since Reagan and Bush is that the population of the United States has to be subjugated by law.
Playboy: Did the record industry fight the labeling hard enough?
Frank Zappa: The record companies are interested in one thing, which is making a profit. If Cop Killer sells millions of records, they are happy about it. They are not happy when police officers' pension funds sell their Time Warner stock and people boycott Time magazine.
Playboy: It must have been strange for you when Al Gore was nominated as vice president.
Frank Zappa: They felt it was a good way to counteract the Dan Quayle-family values nonsense. But why would anybody need to counteract Dan Quayle?
Playboy: They obviously didn't care about your vote - or the vote of the people concerned about Tipper's ratings campaign.
Frank Zappa: Not necessarily. Deep in their hearts, those politicos think they're really cagey strategists. They figured they'd get a certain amount of column inches because of Tipper. It was advertising they didn't have to buy.
Playboy: Your song Trouble Coming Every Day, about the Watts riots, could have been written about the more recent L.A. upheaval.
Frank Zappa: The only part that wasn't apropos was the woman driver getting machine-gunned in half because she drove through a stop sign.
Playboy: What were you doing during the riots?
Frank Zappa: I taped them from top to bottom while flipping through the channels. I got it from every angle that I could, some amazing stuff, things that weren't reported nationally.
Playboy: For instance?
Frank Zappa: Shots of a group of soldiers in a barracks in Orange County wearing Desert Storm nerve-gas clothing. Now either the Crips and Bloods had nerve gas or there were some plans of dealing sternly with the rioters.
Playboy: What did you do with the recordings?
Frank Zappa: When I performed in Germany, we had television sets in the bar during intermission showing the finest of American cultural entertainment. On one set, nonstop riot. On another, nonstop televangelists. On another, C-SPAN. On another, Desert Storm. You got to have your light beer and watch the American media at its finest.

Playboy: You said that you couldn't do some things you wanted to - including running for president - because of your illness. How else has cancer affected your life?
Frank Zappa: The minute somebody tells you you have cancer, your life changes dramatically, whether you beat it or you don't. It's like you have a fucking brand put on you. As far as the American medical profession goes, you're just meat. It complicates your life because you have to fight for your life every single day, besides doing your shit. To do the music is complicated enough, but to think of doing things that involve travel and other kinds of physical stress is too much. Whatever medication you take fucks you up, too.
Playboy: Are you currently taking any medication?
Frank Zappa: I'm forty pounds overweight because the stuff that I'm taking fills me up with water. I'm a walking balloon. You can't just take an Advil or a Nuprin and forget about it. It's a fucking battle.
Playboy: Can you travel, or do you have to stay close to your doctors?
Frank Zappa: Well, you do have to be tested periodically, every couple of months. You want to be close to a doctor you trust. You wouldn't want to go to a Russian hospital. That could put you out of business in a big hurry. A friend of mine was in an auto accident there and wound up in a Russian hospital. They had no anesthesia and no disposable syringes. As the doctor was setting her leg without anesthesia, he said, "Nobody ever died from pain."
Playboy: How long have you known about your cancer?
Frank Zappa: I found out about it in the spring of 1990.
Playboy: It hit out of the blue?
Frank Zappa: I'd been feeling sick for a number of years, but nobody diagnosed it. Then I got really ill and had to go to the hospital in an emergency. While I was in there, they did some tests and found out it had been there for anywhere from eight to ten years, growing undetected by any of my previous doctors. By the time they found it, it was inoperable.
Playboy: How about other treatments?
Frank Zappa: I went through radiation and that fucked me up pretty good. They were supposed to give me twelve shots of that, but I got to number eleven and I was so sick that I said I couldn't go back.
Playboy: Was it helping,
Frank Zappa: I don't want to dwell on all the morbid details of what happened to me, but I'll summarize it. When I went into the hospital, the cancer had grown to where I could no longer take a piss. In order for me just to survive, they had no poke a hole in my bladder. I spent more than a year with a hose coming out of my bladder and a bag tied to my leg. That'll keep you from traveling. The result of the radiation was that the tumor was shrunken to the point where I could get rid of the bag and could piss again, but there were bad side effects. I don't want to talk about it. It's not a picnic.
Playboy: It seems that you can still do a lot of the things you care about-composing, at least.
Frank Zappa: Some days you can do more of it than others. Part of the problem is that it hurts to sit some days, and this work is done sitting at a computer terminal. I used to be able to work sixteen, eighteen hours a day and just get up from my chair and go to sleep and go back to work, and it was fine. But some days I can't work at all. Some days I can work two hours. Some days I can work ten.
Playboy: How does it affect your life with your family?
Frank Zappa: Well, it's not a secret around here. They're very nice to me. They take care of me.
Playboy: Is it an emotional roller coaster for you?
Frank Zappa: The emotional aspect is more influenced by the drugs than it is by the idea that you're sick. What can you do? People get sick. Sometimes they can fix it and sometimes they can't. But the chemicals that they give you to treat it take a toll. The week

before last I found myself in the hospital for three days riddled with morphine. That was definitely an experience I don't want to repeat. When I got out, it took almost ten days to get the residue of all the drugs they'd given me out of my body.
Playboy: At a certain point it must be confusing about what's making you sick, the drugs or the disease.
Frank Zappa: It'll really turn you around. It's difficult if you are the boss of a company, even a little company like mine, and you have to make decisions about what's going on and you can't trust your own decisions because you don't know, chemically, what's happening. It's also difficult not to know how you're going to be one day to the next. The only reason I agreed to do this interview at this time was I thought I was reasonably clear enough to have a conversation. That's debilitating. If you can't trust your own judgment, that's really hard. When you're writing music, every note you put down is a judgment call.
Playboy: We've been talking for hours and yet you seem tireless.
Frank Zappa: You got me on a good day. I mean, tomorrow I could be flat on my back in bed. So you get to be very time-budget conscious. Certain things are time-consuming and the time spent doing them is productive. Other things are time-consuming and it's like being hijacked. I have a low tolerance for wasting time. I try not to be irritable about it, but it's my main concern. I'm trying to live my life the same way that I lived it before, without indulging in any of the things that would waste time.
Playboy: Some people would retire - go to live their life out on some beach.
Frank Zappa: Not me. I'm less inclined to travel, less inclined to leave the house for any reason, just because I happen to like my life in this place, and I like my family.
Playboy: How does it influence the music you're writing now?
Frank Zappa: I don't think it does now, though it did for a while. It's so uncomfortable to work, you may be tempted to say that something's done when it's not done. You physically can't stand to work on it anymore. During one period, I was working on some pieces that I let go before their time. Since they hadn't been released yet, as I gradually felt better, I went back and worked on them to make sure that the level of competence was maintained.
Playboy: But hasn't it affected the mood of the music;
Frank Zappa: No, I haven't started writing sad music. Time is the thing. Time is everything. How to spend time. We all want something to do with our minds. The choices are a major human preoccupation. The people who find the easiest solutions, like beer and football, might be happier if they had just a little dimension to their lives. But most people, once they achieve a certain level of gratification for time disposal, don't go beyond it. They already know how good they're going to feel when a football game comes on, and they have their beer. They don't want to know beyond that. They build a life around it. It's been the same for me since I got cancer as it was before. I have to look way beyond the football game and the can of beer. Once I've gone out there and dabbled on that fringe, I feel as if I may as well bring some artifacts back, in case anybody else is interested. That's what I do. I come back and go, "Here it is. This is what happened after the football game."

Pulse! Magazine: August 1993

by Dan Ouellette
Pulse! magazine is the in-store magazine for Tower Records.

20th-century popular music's philosopher-king (or its Harvey Kurtzman) has inspired independence movements in Eastern Europe and lampooned stupidity in the west. Now he faces his most serious challenge.

It's April, and Los Angeles is nervously awaiting the outcome of the second Rodney King beating trial. A car heads toward Frank Zappa's Laurel Canyon home blaring the song "Trouble Every Day" from the first Mothers of Invention album, *Freak Out!* Written by Zappa in '65, while the Watts riots were escalating out of control, the song is eerily appropriate nearly 30 years later, when the city is once again bracing for the worst. With wailing harmonica and turmoiled bass in the background, the lyrics ominously and prophetically tumble out,

> "It's the same across the nation
> Black and white discrimination
> ...and all that mass stupidity
> that seems to grow more every day
> each time you hear some nitwit say
> He wants to go and do you in
> 'Cause the color of your skin
> Just don't appeal to him
> No matter if it's black or white
> Because he's out for blood tonight."

Why is the song still so poignantly relevant? The irascible and iconoclastic 52-year-old Frank Zappa, who has outdistanced most of his peers in the business by his unflagging commitment to both social critique and adventurous music, fields the question with aplomb. "Nothing has changed. We have the same racial hatred, the same unwillingness to face the causes of racial unrest. We've had years to examine the causes of the Watts riots, but no one has done anything about it. There were studies and reports and conclusions then, just like there were studies and reports and conclusions reached after last year's riots. There's a certain type of American adolescent behavior that hasn't gotten any better since the 60's. Scientists believe that the universe is made of hydrogen because they claim it's the most plentiful ingredient. I claim that the most plentiful ingredient is stupidity."
So opens a 90-minute conversation on politics and music in the legendary and controversial rock/doo-wop/jazz/pop/ avant garde/contemporary classical artist's dark, but comfortable video-viewing room with a television screen and rows and rows of video tapes lining an entire wall. Zappa, casually dressed in blue sweats, turquoise T-shirt and a loose-fitting gray sweater, is animated, fervently enjoying the conversation as he effortlessly interweaves musical matters with politics. During the rest of the afternoon, there are times when Zappa, his dark hair streaked with gray and tied in a tight ponytail, seems absolutely exhausted, a consequence of his ongoing and widely publicized bout with prostate cancer.

But then the conversation takes off into another area of music and/or politics where he has strong opinions, and he is rejuvenated.
"I never had any intention of writing rock music," says Zappa. "I always wanted to compose more serious music and have it be performed in concert halls, but I knew no one would play it. So I figured that if anyone was ever going to hear anything I composed, I'd have to get a band together and play rock music. That's how I got started."
If ever a long-term plan paid off, it has to have been Zappa's--his list of official accolades and honors seems limitless: Renowned conductor Kent Nagano calls him a genius. Zappa won a Grammy in 1987 for his Synclavier-driven *Jazz From Hell* album, and he was chosen to play John Cage's controversial and perhaps most famous piece 4'33" for the upcoming various-artists Cage tribute album, A Chance Operation. His works have been performed by a number of esteemed 20th century ensembles; Pierre Boulez commissioned him to score a symphonic work which resulted in *The Perfect Stranger: Boulez Conducts Zappa* album; the European contemporary music group Ensemble Modern commissioned him to put together a concert's worth of his orchestral works for the Frankfurt Festival last year; and in February, the prestigious Lincoln Center in New York City presented an evening of Zappa's serious music in its Great Performers series. Even *The Simpsons*' creator Matt Groening is on record as saying, "Frank is my Elvis."
Not bad for a guy who began his musical career as a drummer in a San Diego r&b group called the Ramblers in 1956 ("I played one or two gigs with them, but I wasn't very good so they fired me"), recorded parody and instrumental doo-wop tunes in Cucamonga, California and leased them to record companies like Original Sound in Los Angeles in the early '60s, and led the charge into the experimental and distinctly weird rock music of the late '60s with his seminal band of renegades and freaks, the inimitable Mothers of Invention. His formative years as a musician came during his high-school days at Antelope Valley High in Lancaster, a remote Mohave Desert town in California that he refers to as a cultural wasteland. A fan of r&b singles and composer Edgar Varese's innovative and dissonant early-20th-century classical music, Zappa was a drummer in the school band where he was even allowed to do a bit of composing and conducting. But that's also where he began to suspect that he was destined t o live a life deviating from the norms of Americana. "I had no outlet in music then to express my discontent. So my aggravation with the way things were festered throughout my high-school years. The only reason I got training as a musician was because the school needed a marching band at its football games. It was just another tool to support the sports program. I never did enjoy sports. So I looked at all that and thought that there certainly must be more worthwhile educational investments besides new helmets. That really got me thinking--how can you take any of this seriously?"
Fortunately for Zappa, his tenure with the band didn't last long. "I was thrown out for smoking in uniform," he says while taking a drag from one of many Marlboros he would smoke that afternoon. "We had to sit in the freezing cold and wear these dorky maroon-and-gray uniforms and play every time our team scored a touchdown. So, during a break, I went under the bleachers for a smoke. I got caught and I was out of there. Not just for smoking, but for smoking in uniform."
When did Zappa realize the potential for satire in his music? He recalls, "Even before I had this wonderful band called the Mothers [original MOI member] Ray Collins and I used to piddle around in Pomona doing gigs where the two of us would do parodies of folk songs. We sang 'Puff the Magic Dragon' as 'Joe the Puny Greaser,' and we played a perverted version of 'The Streets of Laredo' called 'The Streets of Fontana.' We weren't setting out to make any kind of impact on people. We were just doing it for a laugh, to have fun. If it amused someone else, good. If it didn't, who gives a fuck. Nothing I've ever written has been motivated by trying to impact or influence anybody."Little did Zappa realize how influential his music would become in shaping opinions both at home and abroad. Case in

point: the first two Mothers of Invention albums, *Freak Out!* and *Absolutely Free*. The former, the first rock double-album and the collection which purportedly inspired Paul McCartney to begin work on *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, helped spawn an American subculture of long-haired, irreverent, authority questioning freaks. Behind the Iron Curtain, *Absolutely Free* proved to effect an even deeper and more profound response. The lead-off number of the album, "Plastic People," became an underground hit and potent rallying cry for freedom in the now-divided republic of Czechoslovakia.
Zappa is still surprised by it all. "I had no idea that song made the impact it did there. The album was smuggled into the country within a year of its 1967 release. I found out 10 years later how powerful the song had become. We were touring heavily in Europe at the time, and a few Czechs had come across the Austrian border to hear our concert in Vienna. I talked with them after the show, and they told me that 'Plastic People' was responsible for a whole movement of dissidents within Czechoslovakia. It came as a shock to me to find out that there was a group called the Plastic People there and that a cult of followers had grown up around them. [That song's] especially relevant today in the United States," he says, in reference to a poster on the wall portraying a Hitler-like Ronald Reagan with the words, "He has the right to do anything they want" written underneath.
Zappa then recites a few lines from the song:
"Take a day and walk around Watch the Nazis run your town Then go home and check yourself You think we're singing 'bout someone else?
He pauses to let the effect take hold, shakes his head slowly in disgust, then comments, "There's been an incredible rise in racist and fascist attitudes here, most of them being helped along by the Republican Party. That Republican National Party Convention last summer was just unbelievable. Even the set decor looked like a Nuremberg rally. Hatemongers like Pat Buchanan and Pat Robertson and the rest of the featured speakers were convinced they were going to win again.
"Even if Clinton and his people just stood still for the next four years it would be better than what we had the four previous years under President Nero, which is what Dennis Miller calls Bush". But Zappa goes on to express an early dissatisfaction with the new President. "What's upset me the most since Clinton has taken office is this banning of smoking in the White House. What kind of symbolism is this? It's a social-engineering program by the Health Nazis in the White House against people who like tobacco. I with people would get off this I'm-gonna-live-forever kick and dispel the myth perpetrated by Reagan's evil Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, who said that second-hand smoke is the most dangerous thing Americans confront in their everyday lives. This is from the same guy who told us that green monkeys gave us AIDS.
"I was pleased to note recently that for the first time in the last dozen years, the number of smokers did not decrease last year. It's remained constant. Now if we can just proselytize people to get them to enjoy tobacco more. I like tobacco. I've always loved it. There is a place for tobacco in the human dining experience. It's like wine. It's an appropriate adjunct to food."
Zappa's daughter Diva, in her early teens, bounces down the stairs, pokes her head into the viewing room where we're talking and announces herself with a bright, "Hi, Daddy." She's the youngest of Frank and his wife Gail's four children. (Eldest daughter Moon Unit collaborated with dad on the 1982 novelty tune "Valley Girl" from Zappa's *Ship Arriving Too Late to Save a Drowning Witch*; eldest son Dweezil has released a couple of solo records and currently plays with brother Ahmet in the band, Z-a debut is slated for August.)
"How's little Squeech?" inquires papa Zappa."Squeech is fine, but I don't think that's the name of it. But you can nickname it whatever you want."Diva bounds back up the stairs while Zappa explains their exchange. "We have a new kitten. It's the runt of the litter. It's adorable. I've been calling it Squeech because that's the noise it makes. Diva wanted to call it Toaster, but I guess she's changed her mind."

Squeech. Toaster. Names that could pop right out of one of Zappa's zanier songs that celebrate such quirky characters as Suzy Creamcheese, Billy the Mountain, Big Leg Emma and the Duke of Prunes.

So what is the creative process of Zappa the punster, the satirist, the humorist? He hearkens back to the old days when he was doing a lot of lyric writing: "I'd write lyrics when I was travelling. I was on a flight back from Germany when I came up with the idea for the song 'Dumb All Over'. I scrawled out three pages' worth of ideas on the plane. I couldn't wait to get into the studio to record it. The reverse of that happened with 'Inca Roads.' I came up with the melody first. I took it as a challenge to find words to go with it. A lot of songs may start with one or two words. You hear a funny expression and away you go. Some lyrics were based on folklore from the band when we were touring. 'Punky's Whips' is an example of an absurd situation that happened to be a true story. All I had to do was find some musical way to dramatize it."Zappa's career catapulted in the mid '60s as a result of his wildly experimental and unpredictable band the Mothers of Invention. On Mother's Day, 1964, the name "the Mothers" was coined. The group had evolved from a bar band called the Soul Giants that had recruited Zappa as a substitute guitarist after their regular guitarist got into a fistfight with another band member. Soon after, Zappa pushed for playing original material, and the rest was outlandishly weird music history. Early Mothers-inspired "freak outs" in Los Angeles made the local authorities nervous, so Zappa and crew headed to New York in 1967. There they worked the Garrick Theater on Bleeker Street as an improv house band, performing experimental music with satirical and impromptu slapstick for several months with special sit-in guests, including Jimi Hendrix on one occasion.

Returning to Los Angeles the following year, Zappa and the Mothers formed the nucleus of a musical community that Pamela Des Barres of the Zappa-discovered GTO's (Girls Together Outrageously) recalled in the liner notes to Rhino's promotional Bizarre/Straight sampler, *Zapped*: "Somehow in some mysterious and mystical way, a little crack formed in the Americana prefab facade that allow true, far-fetched inspiration to peek, sneak, leak through for an infinitesimal period of time; a drop in the bucket that made a might splash. I am proud and honored to have been a part of the streaming baptism of lunacy that attempted to shake, rattle and roll the fictitious foundation of normalcy." Zappa gathered as many bizarre acts as he could find and formed his own record companies (Bizarre, Straight) with the help of his then-manager Herb Cohen. Among the Zappa proteges were Tim Buckley, Tom Waits, The GTO's (Jeff Beck and Rod Stewart performed without credit on their Zappa-produced debut), Alice Cooper (Zappa is said to have encouraged Cooper to dress in women's clothes) and Zappa's high school friend, Don Van Vliet, aka the great Captain Beefheart. Beefheart, who Zappa remembers in the early days as carrying his worldly possessions--his art, poetry books and a soprano sax--around in a shopping bag, recorded his dada-esque masterpiece Trout Mask Replica for Straight in 1969. Produced by Zappa as an anthropological field recording in Beefheart's house, the album was deemed the year's "most unusual and challenging musical experience" by rock writer Lester Bangs. After a few days of using a portable taping system that recorded the different instruments in various room sin the house, Zappa compiled with Van Vliet's paranoid demands that the rest of the sessions take place in a real studio, where all his vocals were captured.In addition to Beefheart, Zappa has worked with a wildly diverse crew of artists, ranging from L. Shankar and John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

Of all the collaborations and bizarre tours he went on, which performances from his huge catalog is he most proud of? "I enjoy listening to some recordings more than I do others," he says. "I can't stand to hear some of my classic albums because I remember the horrible conditions under which they were recorded. It hurts to listen to them. But what I like the best doesn't depend so much on the quality of the composition as it does on the memories of how much fun they were to record. I'm especially thinking of some of the live shows with

the 1984 band that were recorded in the *You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore* series. We had a lot of laughs. For example, one night in Seattle, in the middle of the show (guitarist) Ike Willis started to do an imitation of the Lone Ranger, blurting out, 'Hi, ho, Silver!" I still don't know why it happened, but I cracked up every time he did it. It must have been road fatigue. He'd keep yelling in the most inappropriate places. The whole show was riddled with bad Lone Ranger jokes and me not being able to sing the right words. I enjoyed that night.

"Zappa continued touring until 1988, when his road band self-destructed before the tour reached most of the planned U.S. dates. The tour, captured on the excellent *The Best Band You Never Heard in Your Life* double CD, could have been the last time Zappa played guitar in concert. Nowadays, Zappa hardly plays his guitars (he cites lack of motivation), which is surprising given his prowess on the instrument and the fact that he released several impressive guitar albums, including the twin-CD *Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar*. A guitar her who rarely if ever recorded a cliched riff, he learned to play as a kid by swiping blues licks from r&b greats like Guitar Slim, Johnny "Guitar" Watson (who worked with Zappa in the mid '70s) and Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown.

But Zappa--who has been fascinated with and influenced by such classical composers as Igor Stravinsky, Varese, Boulez and John Cage, in addition to having his bands perform arrangements of pieces by Bartok, Ravel, Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky--hastens to note that these days he mostly writes orchestral compositions on his Synclavier 9600, the high-tech digital keyboard and sampling computer that's plugged into his home studio, the Utility Muffin Research Kitchen. That's where Zappa's newest soon-to-be-released gem of an album of his dissonant, whimsical and haunting orchestral works, *The Yellow Shark*, was conceived.Performed in concert by the 25-member European contemporary classical music group Ensemble Modern, *The Yellow Shark* is a suite-like collection of new arrangements of such classic Zappa pieces as "Dog Breath Variations" and "Be-Bop Tango" and such new works commissioned for the project as "Get Whitey" and "None of the Above." EM and its conductor Peter Rundel spent two week s in 1991 in Los Angeles at Zappa's Joe's Garage studio rehearsing the difficult pieces and then spent another two weeks supervised by the perfectionist composer last summer in preparation for the series of eight concerts in Frankfurt, Berlin and Vienna. The album represents the best performances of each piece from the different concert venues.

Zappa, who conducted the whirlwind "G-Spot Tornado" on opening night, is pleased with the results, but notes, "I was only able to attend the first and third performances in Frankfurt. I got sick and had to fly home. If I hadn't been sick, the experience would have been exhilarating. Unfortunately, I felt so excruciatingly shitty that it was hard to walk, to just get up onto the stage, to sit, to stand up. You can't enjoy yourself when you're sick, no matter how enthusiastic the audience."

The public response to and concern about the composer's health problems have been overwhelming. Even PMRC head Tipper Gore, who was at the helm of the late-'80s warning-sticker movement that Zappa so vehemently opposed, contacted him when she hear he had cancer. Zappa says, "The media likes to give the illusion that Tipper Gore and I are mortal enemies. That's not a fact. She sent me a sweet letter when she heard I was sick, and I appreciate that."

When asked what he thinks of a recent article that quoted a friend of his saying, "[Frank's] just not going to be bothered by something as stupid as cancer," he pauses, then soberly responds, "Well that's pretty fucking optimistic. Let me tell you. Cancer can bother you. It can just bother you to death. I'm fighting for my life. So far I'm winning." He laughs, then continues, "I've already beaten the odds. When the cancer was first diagnosed, the doctors didn't give me too long to go. But I've surprised everybody by sticking around this long."

Zappa's prostate cancer was detected in 1990, some eight to 10 years after it had first developed. Since it was in an advanced stage, it was considered inoperable. He's been forced to undergo a bladder operation as well as radiation therapy. He's reticent to talk more about his illness beyond that he's "doing a whole bunch of other stuff" for therapy. Is working on his music a form of therapy? "I do it because that's what I've always done. What's your alternative? Stay in bed or work. If you have a studio and a good staff like I have, and you still have musical ideas, then you go to work and you work until you can't work anymore. (Later, Zappa oversees and, with an acute ear, monitors two of his trusted studio workers, mix engineer Spencer Chrislu and Synclavier operator Todd Yvega, while they painstakingly sample all the notes on Zappa's 97-key Bosendorfer Grand Imperial piano.) I used to be a night owl, but now I'm usually in bed by six or seven in the evening. It's hard for me to work a real long day anymore. I'm up at 6:30 in the morning. If I can do a 12-hour shift, then I feel I'm really doing something. The staff arrives at around 9:30, so that gives me a little time to work by myself before I sit in the studio all day with them."
Zappa's illness also aborted his short-lived, but very serious presidential campaign, as well as curtailed his plans to develop his Why Not? Inc., an international licensing, consulting and social engineering enterprise set up to forge ties between Eastern Bloc and Western businesses. "Until the Soviet Union folded, we spent 50 years of Cold War cash convincing American that we needed to fight against the Evil Empire. Hey, I traveled to Russia five times right when it was on the cusp of glasnost. The place was a fucking disaster area. These people couldn't even deliver milk. The CIA knew that, but why didn't they say the Cold War was for shit and Russia wasn't a threat to us? If we had been working with the Russians to develop what they knew, we all would have been better off. The Russians may not have the money, but they have the brains. My idea with Why Not? was to work with the co-ops of inventors, helping them to license their inventions of industrial processes and equipment design in the West. When I got sick, I had to shut down my plans. It's difficult enough for me to travel, but it's no vacation going to Russia. The conditions are grim there. It's hard to find something to eat, the transportation is a nightmare and since there's no Russian phone book, it's nearly impossible to get in touch with people unless they've given you their telephone number beforehand."
But according to Zappa, his international endeavors have not always been appreciated by his own government. "I have a large and devoted audience overseas, but a lot of people in this country don't know that I still exist. I think that might have something to do with the Republicans, who have never been too thrilled about my existence. I get the feeling that I've been blacklisted in this country," Zappa says. "My music doesn't get played on the radio here. And the only time I'm on TV is when someone wants to get a funny comment out of me for the news."
When Czech playwright/former president Vaclav Havel wanted to make Zappa Czechoslovakia's special ambassador to the West on trade, culture and tourism, the composer reluctantly yielded to Bush administration pressure to ditch the idea.
"Although I resent government," Zappa says, "I can't imagine an effectively functioning society without some machinery to make it work, even if it's incompetent machinery--because the species hasn't evolved to the point where it can take care of itself. So I'm what I call a practical conservative, which means smaller government and lower taxes. What do you call a system that seeks a bigger government and more taxes? Insanity."In many ways Zappa could be a model figure for the rugged individualist of American myth. "...It's not completely true," says Zappa. "I have lots of people helping me to call the shots." Yet in his pre-Mothers' days, he owned his own recording studio, Studio Z, which was where the surf hit "Wipe Out" was recorded. In 1989, his biography, authorized to be written by Peter Occhiogrosso, was transformed into the compelling and hilarious autobiography *The Real Frank Zappa Book* after the subject found Occhiogrosso's style flat and lacking Zappaesque flair. Today, Zap pa, who has released well over 50 albums,

maintains his own publishing rights, records on his own Barking Pumpkin label, runs a mail order and merchandising company called Barfko-Swill and operates the Honker Home Video arm of the Zappa empire. He has a CD re-release deal with Rykodisc, as well as the six-volume series *You Can't Do That on Stage Anymore* (double CDs) for Ryko, and has thwarted the efforts of bootleggers by authorizing Rhino Records to release two series of Zappa-approved bootlegs. he maintains his own hotline message, 818-PUMPKIN, to keep his fans up to date.

Zappa also exercises strict control over performances of his orchestral material. "You'd be surprised at how many orchestras and chamber groups all over the world play my music every year. I get requests for scores all the time. But I won't granter permission if I feel there's not enough money budgeted for proper rehearsal time. I'd rather not have the music played that have it performed in a sloppy way." Any unusual requests? Zappa laughs and says it happens all the time. "The most recent was from the President's own US. Marine Corps Band in Fairfax, Virginia. They want to play 'Dog Breath Variations.' It seems a couple of gunnery sergeants in the ensemble are fans. So we sent them the music. Then there's one from a young filmmaker in upstate New York who wants to use "Elvis Has Just Left the Building" from the *Broadway the Hard Way* album to conclude a mock documentary he's making of current Elvis sightings.

As for future projects, Zappa's slate is full. He continues to dig into his audio archives to issue old material. Just released as the *Ahead of Their Time* CD of a 1968 Mothers concert in London, where 14 members of the BBC Symphony joined the group to provide the Zappa-composed musical accompaniment to a play the band members acted out. Next year Zappa promises another CD of unreleased studio cuts called *Lost Episodes*. Then there's a CD of music for modern dance called *Dance Me This* that he's working on.But what Zappa is most excited about are a couple of projects Andreas Molich-Zebhauser, business manager for Ensemble Modern, talked about during a visit just a couple of days earlier. "Andreas told me about an interview Edgar Varese gave once where he envisioned a film to accompany his piece 'Desert.' I had never heard of that before. Varese said that the images didn't need to relate to the music. Well, the Ensemble is booked for a concert in Cologne, Germany on May 27, 1994. Andreas thought of the extensive data bank of video images I've collected and got the idea to commission me to do a 22-minute film. The other project we discussed was for May 1995 when the Ensemble would perform an evening dedicated to my theatrical works like "Billy the Mountain" and "Brown Shoes Don't Make It" arranged for classical ensemble. I think it will make for an entertaining evening and an entertaining CD."After talking for 90 minutes, Zappa answers a final question: Given that his music over the span of nearly 30 years has remained fresh, relevant, challenging and on-the-fringe, to what does he owe his career longevity? Opinionated on so many other subjects, Zappa displays a rare moment of humility. "I don't know how it's happened. How have I survived? I guess by word of mouth, but I don't know. I got lucky."

The Last Days of Frank Zappa

Ben Watson - October 1993 (just 6 weeks before Franks death)
Mojo Magazine March 1994

On Tuesday, I Tell Frank he is so good at answering "nerdy journalist's questions" that I have prepared 20 I would like him to answer. He tells me to get the tape recorder running and fire away.

It's rare that any musicians who've worked with you do any better when they're out on their own. If your musicians solo they do so at the peek of their intensity - how do you stop them coasting? Is it a matter of giving them instructions, or just the challenge of the musical environment they're given?
I don't understand the question.

Your musicians always play - it seems to me - at the peak of what they're capable of doing. One of the things I really like about your records is that if there's a solo people don't noodle, they don't coast - they really play hard.
Yeah .

Is that because of whet you tell them before they play? Or is it simply the challenge of the music?
The reason is that I tell them before they ploy and because all the live stuff is edited, so I look for the best work that each musician can do, It's not just a matter of cloying something together, I try and make the performance of each tune exemplary in some way. So I'm not just optimising what I write, I'm optimising what they improvise.

I was thinking about seeing you at Hammersmith and watching Eddie Jobson play violin.
Yah.

He's free to play what he likes when he goes off on his solo.
Yeah, well, that's the way it is with all the guys. They know what key they're supposed to be in - they know what kind of a solo it's supposed to be and they know roughly how long it is they're supposed to play. So after that it's them, not me.

I've seen you many times, but your musicians never play that kind of up and down the fretboard fusion thing, that boring thing fusion players so open do.
You mean in my playing?

Not just yours - anybody in your band.
Well, they know the other guys are listening . It's a strong incentive to do a good job - it's a pretty critical audience up there on the bandstand, let alone who's out there in the seats. If you're playing shit, the other guys on the stage are certainly going to let you know about it.

People find the mixture of signals in your music - cerebral abstractions one minute, shocking moments of human dishevelment the next people find this very confusing

. .
Why?

Do you have any advice?
Well that's the universe - it's the way the universe is.

How do you place the score in your work? Is it just a means to an end? In other words, is the art in the score or is it in the master tape?
Well, there wouldn't even be a score if what was being requested of the musicians wasn't too complicated for me to hum it to 'em. In the most instances, for the rock'n'roll stuff I find I get the best results if they're playing this stuff they've memorised rather thon stuff they're reading. The point where the piece goes into muscle memory, you con then conduct it, do things with it that are impossible when they're reading [lights Marlboro]. so the final artistic result is the master tape.

You've made me think harder about the relationship of art to life then any other artist. Do you have a formula to guide you?
Relationship of art to life? Well, I told you before, what I'm doing is entertainment Choose between an entertaining life or the other kind - the 'art' life. The answer becomes obvious.

Even though the music industry has done the most it can to suppress you, are you aware that it needs contrary figures in order to keep people interested in the product?
They don't care, they don't care.

It's as simple as that?
Yah.

Why have you chosen to talk to Rolling Stone? [Music editor David Fricke was invited out two weeks after Watson's visit but Zappa wasn't well enough to come downstairs and meet him. Gail played him some tapes in the studio and he left without an interview.]
Because after all these years, they have got so desperate about having me be interviewed, because I've complained so many times about what a piece of shit kind-of-publication it is and I've got a new distribution deal and a new album coming out - I thought that it would probably be as good a time as any to do it if I'm ever gonna do it.

Why is James Joyce on the list of names on Freak Out! ?
Well, I can't say that I've ever read anything by Joyce all the way through, but the few pages I looked at I saw it and said, Now there's a real guy. It doesn't take much to hove an influence on me.

There are signs that literary and academic people are at last coming round to appreciate your monstrous creativity. I think I can see signs of a Zappa industry in academia that one day might rival the Joyce industry.
[laughs] .

Do you have a message for such people?
Get a real estate license.

Why did Spence Chrislu [Zappa's recording engineer] spend weeks editing the Al Malkin tapes? [25 cassettes recorded by rhythm guitarist Warren Cucurullo] ?
He didn't edit them.

Catalogue them, sorry.
What he did was transfer them from normal cassette to digital cassette, he equalised them and catalogued them - so at a later date I can make a 'thing' out of it, and it's easier to 'make the thing' if it's a piece of tape with code on it - that way you can find the line you're looking for.

I don't know if you went this known or talked about but there was a letter from Terry Gilliam being passed around on Friday night [it . referred to a film script Zappa had written and showed to Gilliam]. I was wondering if you'd like to say anything . . .
Talk about being flattered!

Did you ever watch Monty Python or see Brazil?
Yes - Brazil's my favourite movie.

It's one of mine, definitely. I always liked his things in Monty Python more than the sketches - his graphics.
Yah. He's so funny it's hard to imagine he's an American.

What kind of project is it?
Well I wrote a screen-play and I was looking for someone to direct it. I've been working on it for years.

This is a question from a friend of mine, Johnny Black, who's just written a long article about The Fugs and he wanted to know if they came to see you at the Garrick Theatre?
I think we knew them from when they were playing in San Francisco. I don't know whether they came to the Garrick - we were both working there at the same time. They were working every night and we were working every night, so….

What did you think of them ?
Well, I thought it was a proper piece of entertainment for the time.

When I interviewed Dweezil and Ahmet they did a big routine about Lou Reed, attacking him. It was really funny. I sensed the rivalry going way back to the time of Tom Wilson and Verve and all the rest of it.
There wasn't any rivalry. I only met him once or twice back then.

When I talk to Velvet Underground fans I play them Venus in Furs by Lou Reed followed by Penguin in Bondage and I say, Venus in Furs is just a list of sadomasochistic clichés everyone knows, while Penguin in Bondage is something strange.
Huh-ha-ha. Yes it is.

Is the point that you've experienced more than other people, or just that you care to write about experiences that a lot of people might have but not think to write songs about?
I don't know what the statistics are on the number of people who have experienced

anything resembling Penguin in Bondage, but I just happen to choose song topics not previously covered by other journalists, y'know - dental floss, stuff like that.

Do you think the way that women ore attracted to famous musicians gives those musicians a special attitude? Isn't it strange that so much information given to young people about sex comes from men in a very favoured position?
I think so, I think that's true. There's always been a tradition of didactic blues artists - there's plenty of advice on how to treat your woman, what to do if she treats you bad, how to get one - these are common blues lyric topics.

Hmm. That assumes that the audience is male.
I think for most blues it's true. There's not too many female blues fans

Does everyone have interesting dreams?
I don't know. I suppose to themselves they do. If you've ever hod somebody tell you one of their dreams, it's usually presented in a way that now you're being given the opportunity to hear the most spectacular for-out fucking thing that anybody ever dreamed up - they're all proud of their dreams, even if what you're hearing is miserable.

Did you ever hear the expression Jeder Mann sein eigener Fussball?
No, never heard it.

It means, Everyone their own football.
[laughs].

It was the name of a Dada magazine that became a universal catch phrase during the working class revolts in Berlin at the end of World War.
You know, that was what was great about the '20s, the way you could combine the concept of working class with Dada. God, they don't know what they missed in those days.

The Dadaists went on an anti-militarist procession through the working class districts and got applauded by everyone. It was considered wild.
I've always appreciated Dada and I keep trying to get Ahmet to read about it, because that's him in the flesh, he's a genetic Carrier of that particular gene that has been pretty much bred out of the species. It's like Stravinsky says, It's not enough to want, you have to be. There are people that wish they were Dada but they'll never make it. He doesn't even know what it means, but he exudes it.

What's your favourite colour?
It used to be Naples yellow, but I think purple.

I think of lot of people will be really surprised by purple . . . Hendrix, Prince . . . for what it means.
Well, it's a combination of red and blue, isn't it.

What would you do with radio?
Hmm. Bring back live dramas. There's no live drama on the radio in the US - I know there's still bits and pieces in Europe, maybe in the Far East, but it's a type of theatre that I really used to enjoy when I was a kid because it frees your imagination, and if there's one thing the US needs, it's a little bit of freedom

I don't know if you heard, but the British National Party - the Nazis won on election in the Isle of Dogs recently. Would you join the Anti-azi League?
No. I won't join anything. It's not that I like Nazis - I really hate them. I don't join shit.

It's just that in England, with the position in Europe - Le Pen in France and so on - the Nazis have grown very big. The idea is that everyone who hates the Nazis joins together and says, Not in England.
Yeah. Well, I'd probably have to think twice about that if I thought that me joining would hove any impact at all, but I'm pretty sure that it wouldn't, because you have to remember why those guys are there in the first place - first of all it's a protest vote, and secondly no-one knows who or what they're voting for. So, it could happen anytime anyplace.

I noticed certain 'new age' sounds in the music that preceded Beat The Reaper on Disc Two of Civilisation Phase 3- surely you're joking?
What's a 'new age' sound?

Sounds I associate with new age - shakuhachi or some kind of flute . . .
Mmm [affirmative grunt].

. . . and the throat singing - quite atmospheric sounds. I was quite surprised to hear you use them. Normally . . .
Normally in new age material there is no hint of dissonance, so no matter what you're orchestrating it with, the fact that you're not dealing with lush triads would set it apart anyway. The only thing it has in common with new age music is that the chords are held a very long time, but you couldn't go out and get a new age record contract with that tune, because there's too much going on in it.

You won't collude with the basis of a question, you always say something that blows up the area from where the question's coming from.
The problem with doing a rock interview in the first place is that the person coming to talk to you (a) doesn't know anything about what you do (b) doesn't know about music in general and (c) has already mode up his mind in advance before he comes to you what the answer ought to be to his precious little question. There's no reason to collude. I'm not there to make his life miserable, but you know, by the same token, if you want facts I'll give them to you -you want something else, go someplace else. I still think it's one of the smartest things I ever said, "Rock journalism is people who can't write interviewing people who can't talk in order to provide articles for people who can't read".

I've always loved that one. I also love another one, I think you said it round the same time: "Some rock musicians make a bunch of money and stick it up their noses - I stick mine in my ear".
Yes, millions of dollars worth.

This is probably one of FZ'z Last interviews.

Absolutely Frank

Memorial Tribute to Frank Zappa, Guitar Player March 1994

The obituaries missed the point. he must have known they would. every attempt to shoehorn Frank Zappa into easily comprehensible terms has grasped at painfully inadequate descriptive straws: "Iconoclast," "rocker," "sociologist." Even his latter-day mantle of "avant-garde composer" sounds too tight, too proscribed to quantify the diverse talents, expansive output, intense persona, and fearless tenacity of Frank Zappa.

From 1966's *Freak Out* to 1993's *The Yellow Shark*, Zappa taught musicians to value musical vision and artistic independence above all, to speak, sing, play, and write freely, to misbehave, to challenge convention and fashion. But he also inspired a fierce commitment towards excellence. Players would work for years in hopes of someday being worthy to "play with Zappa," a validation and true arrival on a par with "playing for Miles." For many talented, trained musicians, Zappa audition pieces like "*The Black Page*" are symbolic passages in the quest for technical mastery.

But Zappa's radical individuality also inspired many of today's irreverent underground bands, odd outfits that explore the kind of disarming, primitivism aesthetic of the Zappa/Captain Beefheart collaborations. And though he was always more urbane, satirical, and difficult than either the Grateful Dead or the Allman Brother, Zappa toyed with the similarly influential see-saw between three-chord pop-craft and outside free-jam.

Zappa was generally self-deprecating about his guitar skills, particularly in recent years as he focused his energies on composing and compiling music. But with a Strat, Les Paul, or SG, he was an inspired soloist with a rough, under-your skin tone, wholly idiosyncratic phrasing, and complex rhythmic sense. Even if Frank had released nothing but the three incredible *Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar* albums, he would have secured a place in the instrument's pantheon of innovators. Fortunately, he contributed so much more as a bandleader, arranger, producer, singer, lyricist, and musical mentor.

It's ironic that Zappa,often singled out as eccentric, odd, and left-of-center, consistently rejected the facile notion of the musical artist as a bumbling bohemian who worked only when elusive inspiration hit. It's the same as any other field, he used to say: "You get up in the morning and you go to work. If you dont, dont expect greatness." Maybe it was just his Italian-American immigrant background, maybe just an abhorrence of bullshit, but throughout more than two-and-a-half decades of music making, Zappa retained his sober, matter-of-fact genius. Even his most caustic, bizarre pieces have at their root a man of rare common sense and purpose.

Frank was leading The Mothers of Invention when he made his *Guitar Player* debut in October '68. Over the next quarter-century, his ongoing relationship with the magazine produced cover stories, features, a Soundpage with his son Dweezil, and the early-'80s Absolutely Frank column. But nothing taught us more than when we co-produced 1992's *Zappa!*, a special "one-shot" magazine. Frank gave us reams of great material, literally edited every word, oversaw every graphic, and made numerous-make that *countless* microscopic changes.

When the 52-year-old died on Saturday, December 4, 1993, from complications of prostate cancer, he left a legacy that invites grandiloquent testimony. But Zappa never needed anyone to speak on his behalf, and we've done enough already. Here are some highlights from many remarkable conversations.

January 1977: Beyond Gnat Notes

Take the time to listen to the guitar solos on Johnny "Guitar" Watson's "Three Hours Past Midnight," Guitar Slim's "The Story of My Life," or just about any of B.B. King's solos from that period [the 50's]. For my taste, these solos are exemplary because what is being played seems honest and, in a musical way, a direct extension of the personality of the men who played them. If I were a music critic, I would have to say that these values mean more than the ability to execute clean lines or clouds of educated gnat-notes.

I get the same sensation listening to Wes Montgomery. You hear Wes when you hear him play. he puts his personality, something about him as a person, into playing, and I dont detect "watch me show off now"-there is none of that syndrome. That's the thing that is most obnoxious about current guitar, because when people are attempting to play in a competitive way, in order to do somebody else's style but just do it faster, that's great from an Olympic competition kind of stand-point, but I dont think it's particularly musical. And since I like music, it would not necessarily excite me to hear someone playing something real fast, if it wasn't unique to the individual.

February 1983: Self Amusement

I write because I am personally amused by what I do. The fact that it comes out as just something that has to do with the business world, rather than the artistic world. Even if I wasn't releasing records, I would still do it.

February 1983: Playing Guitar

I hardly ever touch it. The only time I play guitar is when I know I'm going on tour. I practice a little bit before we go into rehearsal to get the calluses built up again. Then I play during rehearsals, and when we get out on the road, I usually practice an hour a day before each show. Once the tour is over, I don't touch the guitar. Lately I've gone six months without touching my guitar. Do I miss it? In a way, yes; in a way, no. I really like the instrument and I really like to play, but when the responsibility for running the business rests on my shoulders, there isn't any time to practice. There's no time for the kind of guitar player enjoyment that the readers of you magazine might imagine a person might indulge in. If you really love the guitar, then you're going to spend every waking hour stroking the thing and playing through peculiar rituals.

February 1983: Outside Influences

I'm not a consumer of pop music. I don't listen to the radio. I don't go to see groups. I don't buy albums. I've got too much other stuff to do; that world is not for me. I'm not interested.

February 1983: Songwriting

Every song is different. It just depends on what it's eventually going to wind up being. It could start off with two or three words. And I always write a few songs when I'm out on the

road. Songs that are basically vocal-oriented. I usually start off with a story idea or just a phrase. There's one song I made up on the last tour (in '82) called "Baby Take Your Teeth Out." Just those words turned into a song. Other ways: You can start off with something from a sound check, when you're playing a few chords while warming up. You say, "Those chords sound good," and the next step is to decide what you're going to do with it. That's for the most basic type of material-the easy stuff where you can just hum it to the band and say, "Okay, I'm doing this. You do that, you play this beat, and you come in here." That's the easy way of putting rock and roll together.

The compositions on paper are done a totally different way. That's the only time I need a piano. I can just sit in an airport and write it down on paper too. Some of the pieces to be performed by the London Symphony were written in airports or hotel rooms with no appliances whatsoever. Then I'll test the parts of the harmony lines on the piano, refine it, and then generate a handwritten score in fairly messy condition, which I then give to the copyist I have on the payroll. He'll ink and copy parts, and it's done.

February 1983: The Real Crux of the Biscuit

If I put another guitarist on my album, I hire that person because he plays things I can't play. And if the music requires a certain type of performance, and the composition is the real crux of the biscuit, then you don't want to be unfair to the composite and play it yourself if you're going to play it all wrong. So you get people who can do it. It's not a matter of being lazy.

December 1982: Chord Changes

I don't like chord changes. I like to have one tonal center that stays right there, or possibly with a second chord that varies off the main tonal center. And then I play around that. I don't know if you ever listen to American Indian music-there are no chord changes in that, but you can hear implications of all kinds of other chord changes and lines that are played against each other. That's the way I like to work. There's a little four-note vamp in "Treacherous Cretins" (on *Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar*) that implies *Dm* and *A* chords. It creates a *harmonic climate*. I don't think of them as chord changes. Instead, I look at the whole as a harmonic climate or harmonic *attitude* that sets up a mood-the combinations of the alternation of those two chords. And so I play inside that attitude. I can play lines that include the notes of both chords. I get to play *C#s* and *C Sharps* in that way.

April 1984: Video

Here's how the rip-off works: Even if the record company told you they were going to pick up the tab for your splendid little video masterpiece, they can give you a hose-job any time. They hold all your royalties. They will take the cost of the video out of your pocket before you can make a nickel from any records sold.And as an artist, you don't stand a chance of prevailing against them in court.

As a musician in America, your value as a human being is (to put it mildly) *small*. I f you area rock and roll guitarist-*less than small*. If you go to court with them, the judge will look at them and their well-tailored lawyers and say, "These are honest, worthwhile, productive members of an important American industry." Then he'll look at you and say, "Scum of the earth! How dare you complain about your treatment by these fine men? Do you think you

even have a right to be *alive* in our great land? Go away, and be thankful I have not given you the death penalty for questioning the behavior of this spotless company!" make no mistake: You will pay!

May 1984: The Record Company Hose-Job

It is within the realm of possibilities that professional musicians who already have record contracts read this magazine. This message is specifically addressed to them. Eventually, in the course of your contract with a record company, you will ask yourself, "Am I getting the hose-job? Are these guys paying me what they really owe me?" The answer is often, "No." Why? Because they think you are a clown with a studded dog collar on.

Record companies like to hold onto your royalties until the very last moment because they collect interest on your and everybody else's money as long as they can. Unless you area clown, or your manager is a clown (or worse), *it always pays to audit*. Few, if any, audits of record company books have shown that their version of what they owe you is correct. There always seems to be some "mere oversight" that "might necessitate rectification." When you catch them with their pants down, they talk funny. if your auditor discovers aromatic fiscal behavior at the digital level, the response from the company is likely to be hostile. Tell them to go die someplace! Do not bend over.

February 1983: Ritual De Lo Habitual

I work until I can't stand it, and then I go to sleep. It varies from day to day. I work a few 20-hour days, and then it settles down to a mild 12 for a couple of days.

February 1983: Choosing Axes

If you pick up a guitar and it says, "Take me, I'm yours," then that's the one for you. You dont go into a guitar store and say, "Hey, what a great paint job." You have to put it in your hand, because a real guitar that's going to be something you make music on-as opposed to a piece of machinery that makes you look good onstage-is going to have a relationship to your hand and body. It feels right when you pick it up. And that's the way I felt when I got the first SG that I had. Same thing with the Gibson Les Paul.

May 1983: Man on Bass

I like a bass player that tells you a story by playing the roots every once in a while. A lot of those modernistic-type personages don't want to do that. They think it's beneath their dignity to play the bottom note of the chord. And that's not for me. I like somebody who tells me the key I'm in.

May 1983: Bonking

My idea of a good time is a really simple-minded song followed by something that is out to lunch, and then back to simplicity again, and then out to lunch again. That's the way the world really is: It's not totally complex, and it's not totally simple. It's a combination of both. I also like to have a *bonk, bonk, bonk* track with complicated things going on above it, and vice versa: a complicated track with really simple, long-tone melodies going on above it. It

makes for the variety that keeps the interest going. And whether the *bonk, bonk, bonk* is provided by the drummer doesn't make any difference. I mean, you can have a *bonk, bonk, bonk* sensation just by having a tack piano playing quarter-notes on a II chord-just playing a choppy rhythm like that, a real simple part, and everybody else is going wild. As long as there's something that the audience can hear and say, "Okay, here's what we're relating to, and because we can understand this bonking over here, the rest of the stuff must mean *that,* because it's related to the *bonk*." You need to have a clue for the audience to start from before they can understand how fantastic the other stuff is. If there's no basic time, if there's no basic pulse where the audience can sense a foundation of some sort, then I don't think the piece works as well. It sounds like "modern jazz," you know, where there's a bunch of guys ego-tripping their brains out and just playing a bunch of poot, which, when combined, cancels itself out in to this kind of little, brown cloud of nothingness that doesn't make any difference.

December 1982: More Garlic, Please

If I miss a note, I'm not going to commit suicide over it. I'm sure that thee are perfect guitar players out there someplace, but I'll guarantee you they ain't gonna play like me. I'll go out on a musical limb; I'll go out and try it. Why not? What have I got to lose? I'm not famous; I'm an unknown guitar player. Nobody's going to punch my scorecard the wrong way or give me brown stars if I screw up. Big deal, I'll take the chances. The rest of the guys that have the big reputations have to always play exactly in their style and do it right, and make sure it comes out perfect! What I do *sort of* sounds like the record, but usually what you get in other performances of guitar stuff is lacking in something. Vinnie Colaiuta has an expression; he says, "It has no *garlic* in it." You know, there's plenty of garlic on the *Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar* albums. They take chances and go out there and try things that *polite society* would rather people ignore.

The Mother of All Interviews: Part 1

By Don Menn
From *A Definitive Tribute to Frank Zappa* (Best of Guitar Player, 1994)

When we first contacted the Zappa family in early 1992, we were hoping that Frank would be willing to give us an updated interview to combine with stories we had published over the years to create a Zappa-only special issue. However, Frank and his wife Gail were so helpful that the project mutated into something quite different: a whole issue filled with new *Zappa material. The centerpiece of that* Zappa! *issue was this wide-ranging, in-depth conversation with The Man himself. -- Editor*

What began last April [1992] on the phone with "you've got two hours" turned into four hours in person a couple of weeks later, and then several days in May, and then more than a *week* in June. So it went throughout the summer, by phone and in person, with the cassette recorder running and eventually with video cameras going late into the night, when *The Simpsons* creator Matt Groening asked if he could come along and pose some questions to the man he called "my Elvis."

Everyone who works with Frank speaks of how he pushes limits. We lived what they meant. Here, then, is the condensed (!) version of the most amazing series of interviews I've ever been granted, by the most brilliant human I have ever faced, in the most open household I have ever entered.

What impelled you to start writing music?
I liked the way it looked.
Where had you seen it?
Well, everybody has seen sheet music before.
But were you studying it in grade school, or was it just something you picked up as a drummer?
No. In my earliest experience I was doing a lot of drawing, sketching, painting, and that kind of stuff. And I was interested in art, and I always liked the way music looked. And I liked to listen to music, but when I started writing it, I just basically started doing it because I liked the way it looked.
When did you first start writing notes down on paper?
Around 14, I think.
And it was pen on paper?
Yes. It was a C5 Speedball.
Before you even took up guitar?
Yeah. I was still playing snare drum in orchestra.
Did you have a sense of being able to hear what you were putting down?
Absolutely not. I didn't have the faintest fucking idea what it sounded like. I mean, I was so ignorant, I thought that all you did was you got an idea for the way it looked, you drew it, and then you found a musician who could read it -- and that's how you did it. I was literally

that naïve. Fortunately for me, there weren't any people around who could read music; otherwise I probably would have stopped very early in my career.

Have you kept track of the exact number of works you've done?

No. It's in the hundreds.

Charles Ives used to pile up music that he would bind and put in the barn after a period of time. Do you have the feeling of the same accumulation of works that won't ever be heard?

Yeah. Well, I knew that most of them would never be heard from the day I started writing them. But you can hear them yourself while you're writing them -- once you get past the graphic stage, at the point where you know what the symbols actually mean in terms of what it will sound like if you ask somebody to do such and such by drawing this symbol on a piece of paper. Once you understand what the audio result is going to be of that dot that you just drew, then you hear it yourself as a writer.

Many modern composers, though, have given up because they can't get their work heard by other people. Charles Ives once said that the reason he ran an insurance company was because he thought if he'd been thinking of commercial music it would be bad for his family because there would always be conflict about whether his stuff was going to sell or not. He thought it would be bad for him because he'd always be worried about that same question, and ultimately it would therefore be bad music. How have you managed to avoid becoming an insurance executive?

Well, that's probably one of the great mysteries of musical history: how I've been able to afford the luxury of doing what I like to do and earn a living at it. One clue is that I started early, at a time in the business when, if you were doing something odd, you could get in and get a contract -- not a lucrative contract, but you could at least get a contract of some sort to make a record. And you could build an audience based on whatever the acceptance would be in that odd thing that you did. Today it would be impossible for anybody to get a contract and do what I did. And after the first contract expired, I began looking for alternate ways to stay in the business without being the victim of the record companies. That finally led me to be my own record company, which is not exactly like being an insurance salesman. But let's just say that the difference in economic yield between what I would be having as take-home pay if I was an artist assigned to a label as opposed to being a record company executive -- there is no comparison. Because even though I don't sell enormous amounts of records, the amount of cash that you can earn from selling small amounts of records and being your own record company makes all the difference in the world.

Do you have a sense of you audience today being the same as your original one?

You mean, are the people who buy my records the ones who started buying them in 1964-'65?

Yeah, the Mothers Of Invention crowd.

No. I definitely know that it's not, even just referring to the letters that we receive, which are from all age groups. There's little or no communication from anybody that would fit the profile of an early MOI fanatic. There are a few of them still out there, but basically all they liked was that early stuff. And that's all they bought. That was it.

What sort of organizational elements or ideas do you use when you're creating? Do you just sit down and think, "This is going to be a 12-tone section," or, "We're going to improvise this part," or do you just sort of wing it and then bring all your intuitive skills into creating a work?

It depends on what kind of a work it is. When I first started off writing, it was just writing. It was a graphic concept. Then I found out about 12-tone music, and I thought, "Oh, great. Now all I have to do is keep all 12 notes in order and there's no problem, and you don't even have to worry about what it sounds like because the intrinsic value is determined arithmetically by how nicely you've manipulated all these 12 notes and making sure you

don't hear note number 1 until number 12 gets its turn." I was doing stuff like that at 17 and 18 years old. I finally got a chance to hear some of it, and I really didn't like the way it sounded, so I stopped doing it.

Twelve-tone music of your own?

Yeah. I mean, I had heard some 12-tone pieces by other composers that I liked, which is one of the reasons why I went in that direction, but as a system it was too limiting for me. I asked myself the basic question: If the intrinsic value of the music depends on your serial pedigree, then who in the fuck is going to know whether it's any good or not? Only the people who sit down with the score and a magnifying glass and find out how nicely you rotated those notes. And that's pretty boring. So I started moving in the direction of what you might call a more haphazard style. That's whatever sounded good to me for whatever reason, whether it was some crashing dissonance or a nice tune with chord changes and a steady beat in the background.

So you're really just interacting with your own work, and whatever musical skills you've built up over the years really are the organizational elements.

It's like being a cook. And if you were a really good cook, and you had a lot of money for really excellent ingredients and really good equipment, then you could cook just about anything. Everything that you need would be some easily identifiable delicacy. But if you don't have all the gear, and you don't have all the finest ingredients, and you don't even own a cook-book, but you still want to eat, and nobody's going to cook it for you, then you better find some other way to improvise that dish. And that's kind of the way the stuff gets put together.

Have you ever tried to specifically imitate an older form like a concerto in a grander sense?

No. I mean, I learned all about those things during the times when I was studying, and it just seemed to me that the reason why those forms existed was so that people with limited imaginations could comprehend what the composer was intending to do. A lot of those forms were inflicted on composers by royalty, who insisted that things should be in little compartments like this, this, and this. And if you weren't like that, then it wasn't suitable for the consumption of the king.

I studied music theory and harmony with a man who strongly felt that music should reflect the sounds of any given time, and that theory from Bach and Mozart's time was not very relevant to our time or music. In terms of reflecting modern times and sounds, how far do you feel one should go in sampling, say, jackhammers or women in labor? You've built up a huge catalog. Are these the elements you use?

I have a very good jackhammer recording, which was included in the album that I just finished last night -- *Phaze III*. [*Ed. Note: In fact,* Phaze III *was not finished until the fall of 1993.*] I've got jackhammers in it. There was a beautiful digital recording made during the construction of our new kitchen. I think that my interest in these stems from Varèse's concept of organized sound. But the musical question that I have is, what constitutes organization? In other words, if you have a really good recording of a jackhammer, and you decide to splice it into a really good recording of a woman in labor, have you organized it or not? At what point are you composing and at what point are you collecting?

It's interesting to hear what Stockhausen or Boulez can do with 12-tone music, where there's beauty coming out of something that is potentially a very rigid and dogmatic approach to creating something. That's where the artistic element comes in.

Well, the element of beauty is pretty subjective, too. You can listen to those works and admire the organization, but what you hear is a result of what instruments are playing. And if you like the instruments and the way that they're being played, then the thing that you are listening to is the activated air molecules responding to a set of instructions on paper, which are then executed by the musicians, which then tickle the air molecules, which then

tickle the microphone, and you get to hear and make your decision. That same piece played by any other group of instruments or the jackhammer or the woman in labor, even though it might have the same serial pedigree, might not be as fun to listen to.

Did you learn by reading out of books on counterpoint and --

No, I never studied counterpoint. I could never understand it. I hated anything with rules, except for 12-tone, because it was so simple-minded. It was as simple-minded as the idea of getting a pen and some paper and some Higgins ink and just drawing some music. But all the rules of counterpoint and what constitutes good counterpoint, I just couldn't force myself to do that, and I could barely make it through the harmony book, because all the formulas that you learn there sound so banal. Every time one of the exercises was presented, you would hear how the chords were supposed to resolve. All I could hear was the infliction of normality on my imagination. And I kept wondering why should I pollute my mind with this shit, because if I ever got good at it, I'd be out of business.

When Charles Ives was at Harvard studying harmony he was going crazy the way you're describing, and he wrote home to his father, saying, "This guy wants me to resolve my chords better," and his father wrote him back and said, "Tell your professor some chords just don't want to resolve."

Well, you can tell it to a professor if you have that kind of a relationship with a professor. I mean, I really didn't have professors. The harmony training I got was because I was an unruly senior in high school, and they gave me permission to take some harmony classes at the adjoining junior college. They figured that the reason why I was such a delinquent was because my mind wasn't occupied. So they let me take this course at the junior college while I was senior. The guy who was teaching it was a guy named Mr. Russell, who was a jazz trumpet player, and I don't think that he enjoyed harmony very much either, but that's what he was teaching. I could have said to him, "Hey, some chords shouldn't resolve." And he would probably say, "Yeah, but you'll get a D if you don't resolve them."

What book did he give you? Was it Walter Piston's *Harmony*?

Yeah, it was Piston.

That's a hard one to stay awake through.

You remember? I hate to read also. It's very difficult for me to digest any kind of information in that way. I'm pretty good at the news magazines. But even with all the digital equipment that I've got, I've almost never cracked a manual on any of it. Basically, I've learned how to work it by just having somebody show me. And then after I've learned the basics, I'll figure out ways to make the system do stuff that was never in the book in the first place.

It's a better way to learn.

Also, in cases of digital equipment, even the best is often accompanied by pretty dismal technical manuals. It's not just that they're boring to read, they're also incomplete. And some of the things that I do with the equipment, the manufacturers never envisioned that such a task would be performed. So even if you've read the book from cover to cover, you'd still have to call the company and say, "Will it do this? If it won't, can you put these two wires together to make it do that?"

How many hours a day do you work? Do you have a regular schedule?

Well, I work as many hours a day as I can physically stand to. The average is about 15 now.

Seven days a week?

Yeah, eight if I can squeeze it in.

Don't you take little vacations?

When I get tired, I go to sleep.

How do you break your work time down? It's not like an hour listening, an hour practicing, an hour revising, an hour writing?

What I do depends on what kind of a job I'm working on. Like, for the last two months, I've been heavily involved in record production, so a record production workday would be a different kind of a workday than one on the Synclavier. Usually, I just get up, get something to eat, go downstairs, and go right to the Sonic Solutions [Frank's editing system for mastering CDs]. I'll transfer tapes onto the hard drive and start editing them, equalizing them, and building things. And then, after an album has been constructed, I'll dump it off, reload the hard disk, and keep going. And I usually work at night to do that sort of thing. We have an engineer [Spencer Chrislu] who works from 9:00 in the morning until 7:00 at night, four days a week. My schedule overlaps his. I'll give him instructions on what needs to be mixed, tell him how I want it done, and he'll get the thing set up. By that time, I'll go to sleep for four or five hours and then get up in the afternoon, and he will either have completed the mix or be about ready to put the thing on tape. So I'll sit with him from, say, 4:00 to 7:00 and supervise the mixes. And I take an hour off to eat. And by 8:00, I'm back at the Sonic Solutions. I usually work until about 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning.

Have you ever lost any of your music in a computer crash or a tape meltdown?

Yeah.

How do you protect or store your work?

Well, operating the Sonic Solutions is a little bit like playing with isotopes, because you never know when it's going to do weird things to you. It's a fantastic device, but there are some incredible bugs in the software, and it can do heinous things to you. One of the things that you have to learn to live with is a little sign that pops on the screen every once in a while that says, "Free memory is now less than 250Mb. You may wish to close some files you are not using or reboot in order to clear the system memory." And if you don't do that right away -- if you don't stop what you're doing and reboot this thing, which takes about five minutes -- what it will do is randomly erase whole files on the hard disk. I don't know why. It's like it's got its own built-in virus that gets you every once in a while.

Have you talked to the manufacturer?

Oh, yeah. We haven't been hired as a beta test site, but I'll guarantee you that if they haven't taken into consideration fixing some of the things that we've experienced here when upgrading their software and their hardware, they've lost a good bet. One of the reasons why I got this thing is because it's possible to do multi-channel edits in it, not just for a stereo device. And in preparation for this project in Germany, we had been doing six-channel mixes of Synclavier stuff and other things, and I needed a device that would allow me to glue these things together. So I purchased from them this upgraded, multi-channel system, and from day one it didn't work. They've had their engineers down here fucking around with this thing. It's unbelievable. I still haven't signed the check over to them. I said the day you make this system work, you get the money. [*Ed. Note: The company has since been paid. The unit works.*]

How many Sonic Solutions are there?

I don't know. I hope there's thousands of them, because I want this company to stay in business, because it's a good machine. The things that it can do! I mean, can you imagine a Mac-based system that has software that will allow you to automatically take clicks and crackles and noise out of tape? The de-noising software for this thing -- which is something that I didn't buy because it was so expensive -- but I wish I would have had something like that when I first started working on the catalog of all the old tapes. All you need is just a little sample of the tape hiss or the room noise or whatever it is that you want to get rid of, like just the merest amount of audio between the paper leader and where the music starts, and the machine will take a snapshot of that noise. And it builds a filter, and you run your music through that filter, and the music stays and the noise goes.

Kent Nagano says working with you is a wonderful experience because you're so involved with the specific individuals in the orchestra, listening to their ideas, considering them carefully, and then excerpting from them or even changing your

own original idea. Have you had equal success with Zubin Mehta's or Pierre Boulez's groups?
Well, the case of working with Zubin was all pretty cut and dried. The Los Angeles Philharmonic management thought that it would be a successful concert. They certainly didn't do it because of musical content. Basically, I had to buy the privilege of having my music performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic. In order to prepare the parts for the orchestra, I had to pay the copying rate, which in 1971 was somewhere between $7,000 and $10,000. I'll guarantee you I didn't make anything like that from the concert. Plus the fact that they wouldn't even let me make a cassette recording of the performance. They told me that if I turned the tape on, I would have to pay the whole orchestra Musicians' Union scale. So they had two rehearsals for all this music, and -- you know -- it was a festive occasion because there was a rock group onstage and an orchestra playing, and it was being done in a basketball stadium. So there we have it. As far as working with Boulez, the musicians were a little bit different. First of all, there were fewer of them, so you could actually have memorable conversations with them. And a number of them had asked me to write solos for them. One of the brass players was also the head of a brass quintet that worked within Boulez's Ensemble Intercontemporain. And he wanted me to write some brass music. And usually percussionists will come up to me and ask me for music. I never did manage to do any of those things, because they all take time.
I love *The Perfect Stranger.*
Well, then you're going to love the new release of it, because it's coming out on CD. When it was originally released, Angel pressed 5,000 copies. Digital recording was in its infancy at that time, and I've always been less than enthusiastic about the sound of that first CD. I though that it didn't come anywhere near what the musicians really sounded like in the room. Last July or so, we got a new Neve console in the studio, which is far cleaner and much better sounding than the Harrison that we had for the last 10 or 12 years. So I mixed it. And those new mixes are on the CD re-release.
You've reissued so many of your albums as CDs; is that to clean up the past?
Well, to the extent that it's feasible. I received some negative comments about some of the ways that I tried to clean up some of the early albums. But now that I have the Sonic Solutions, it's possible to go back to those early Mothers Of Invention albums, take the original mixes, and run them through this device, and for all the purists out there, at some later date, put out a CD version of those original mixes cleaned up in a very professional way.
People like to hold on to the past. Some cling to the notion that vinyl is better and that CDs somehow pollute what music ought to be.
I think that the major drawback to the CD is the tiny size of the artwork. I believe one of the things that people who collect records like is the tactile sensation of handling a well-conceived album package. There can be stuff in it, and if you've something in your hand, then you can read it, and the pictures look better. That's one drawback about a CD. it's a little square plastic thing.
My aging eyes have a harder time reading the little inserts than they do the fliers that used to come in the records.
Well, I don't read them. My eyesight has gone to shit, and I'll rarely bother to try squinting at the microtype on those things. Only if I'm absolutely in need of vital information will I reach for my glasses and squint at the package. I like a CD because it's convenient, and to my ear it sounds better than vinyl, because I always hated the squashed dynamic range and the intrusion of all those little crackles.
What was the first performance of your "serious" music?
Actually, the first time I had any of it performed was at Mount St. Mary's College in 1962.
What was the occasion?
I spent $300 and got together a college orchestra, and I put on this little concert. Maybe

less than a hundred people showed up for it, but the thing was actually taped and broadcast by KPFK. Last year a guy in England, who somehow got a copy, sent me a cassette of it, but I haven't bothered to listen to it.

Are you afraid to?

No. But listen: Anything that takes place in real time needs to be budgeted. Listening requires real time. Spooling material onto your hard disk requires real time, and I'm very conscious about how much time it takes to do certain things, so I limit the recreational listening and try to spend as much time as I can actually making product and doing work.

When you were building your career, then, your focus on so-called "serious music" began much earlier than your becoming a rock and roll star.

By the time I graduated from high school in '58, I still hadn't written any rock and roll songs, although I had a little rock and roll band in my senior year. I didn't write any rock and roll stuff until I was in my 20s. All the music writing that I was doing was either chamber music or orchestral, and none of it ever got played until this concert at Mount St. Mary's.

And did it sound like music is supposed to sound?

Oh, no. It was all oddball, textured weirdo stuff.

You started out that way, and as time went on it got more so.

Yeah. In fact, this concert even involved sounds on tape. I was doing tape editing of electronic music, and part of all the pieces had this little cheesoid Wollensak tape recorder in the background pumping out through mono speakers -- sounds that were supposed to blend with the acoustic instruments. And there were sections of improvisation and a lot of different experimental techniques.

Varèse wasn't doing that stuff. Who was influencing you at that time?

By that time, I had already heard Stockhausen. I had already heard Boulez. I had a much broader musical horizon than just my first Varèse album, and even owning that was a major achievement, living in Lancaster [California] and trying to get ahold of that kind of stuff. Try to figure *that* out. Well, the Varèse record I actually got when I was in high school in San Diego. But by the time I moved up to Lancaster, I was really isolated. We were poor and albums were expensive, so if you were going to invest that kind of money in some sort of audio artifact, by golly, you were going to listen to it until it was dust. You were going to get your fuckin' money's worth out of it. And so my musical education came from vinyl and large 12-inch-square things that you could actually read on the back. And some of these albums had useful liner notes.

Did you have to pay for those yourself?

Well, I got a little allowance, and I saved my allowance up, and then I could buy them, because they were too big to steal. If Stockhausen had been on 45s!

You would have been much more educated sooner.

Sure. If they would have had singles of that type then, because those are the kinds of things you could stuff in your pants or your jacket. I would say maybe 3% of my R&B 45 collection was achieved through illicit means, but the albums not.

I grew up in Kansas city, and I remember hearing Shostakovich when I was a little kid and liking him a lot, but Varèse and Stockhausen just weren't at the record store. It was like trying to find black music on the radio.

All those things can be harmful to a young person's mind. In states like Kansas, you probably get the death penalty for distributing a record like that.

In medieval time, playing a third was *verboten* because it was considered too beautiful, and people concluded that it therefore came from the devil. And then later playing a tritone was also ruled *verboten* because it heralded the coming of the devil. And even in the South, when Robert Johnson whanged away on his acoustic guitar, the blues was synonymous with "holding hands with the devil." What is there about music that people consider so scary?

You have to remember who's writing about it. The real question is, if a person must write about music, why must he often mention the devil in the same context?

That's what I'm asking you.

It tells you more about the mentality of music writers than it does about music listeners, because the goal of the writer is self-aggrandizement. There's only one reason to write: because you consider yourself to be a writer, and you want people to pay attention to what you wrote. It's the bane of your existence that you must write about somebody else doing something that you can't do. The general summary that I make of most people who are in the world of music criticism -- be it for rock and roll or whatever -- the important thing is how clever will your column be. A lot of people are forced into the world of rock and roll musical criticism; at least there is such a world to keep them employed, because they sure as fuck couldn't do anything else. So it doesn't surprise me that one often finds references to the devil in any kind of music criticism.

Here's the other thing you have to remember about the early writers on music: The people who could write were writing for an audience that was very limited, because not everybody could read in those days. And those who could were of the church and the nobility, people who certainly had dealings with the devil because they helped to invent the son of a bitch in order to keep the potato-eaters in line!

Kent Nagano says that you and he have had an ongoing discussion about art and entertainment. He says that you believe all art should be entertaining, while he feels art could be something more than entertainment.

Well, I don't really understand people who think of art as an antidote to entertainment, something that should not give you a pleasurable experience. What's wrong with that? I mean, the idea of punitive art -- that sounds like something from the East Village.

An "effete snobbism," perhaps?

I don't know whether I would use those kinds of terms, because I happen to think that snobbery is all-pervasive. Every social group has its own special snobbery. You don't have to be a guy with a top hat and a bow tie on to be a snob. You can be snobby and be a truck driver. There's always somebody who doesn't belong to your set. You're always looking for somebody who's either below you or outside your social realm. So, to put something down -- describe it as an alien phenomenon, in terms of snobbery -- is something that I don't think makes a very good argument. It's a strange idea, to me, to think that the more strenuous the experience is, the more artistic it is -- like the ugliest picture is the best art. What do you mean? Who needs that shit? The most interminable, grinding composition, even if it's well conceived... should you be forced to consume it because somebody says it's artistic, or should you consume it because you like it?

So it's not like you would ever subscribe to one of those comments where people feel that artists are somehow better than other people.

Well, I don't think that they are *better*. They're definitely different.

What do you see as different?

I just think that it's a different process to create a piece of music than it is to bounce a check, even though they both may be a little bit creative. Creative people may from time to time bounce checks, but people in Congress very seldom write sonatas.

Why do you think people in Congress look so askance at artists? What's the problem with the message of art?

It's very threatening to them because there's always a chance that an artist will speak his mind, and a politician never will, and there's a certain envy there.

You say the most grinding music shouldn't necessarily have to be endured. How much consideration do you feel the artist should take in presenting or creating for an audience?

You have to have some picture in your mind of what you're doing and who you're doing it

for. And the way I do mine is, I have to like it first. If I like it, then it's good, and it's done. And then if somebody else likes it, then that's good, too. And if they don't, that's too bad.

And you feel that over the years you've been able to reach a level whereby you're satisfying your own particular artistic needs and, luckily, at the same time reaching a volume of people who seem to like it?

Well, the biggest difficulty I have is getting the product to market, because there are so many forces aligned against me as an independent.

The tyranny of radio, you mean?

It's not just radio. I mean, I've experienced things like major record-store chains owned by Christians who refused to stock my work. The most recent example, I think, was in *Billboard* about a year or a year and a half ago. This chain from Washington State refused to stock my records. They wouldn't even stock instrumental albums.

Because of your strong language?

Let me just say that there isn't anything on any of my records that isn't piled four inches deep on any of the rap albums that are major economic successes. I mean, there's nothing I've ever said on any of my albums in terms of sexual lyrics that hasn't been surpassed many times over in current rap or dance music. The thing that's threatening, I believe, is the fact that these people know that if they come after me, I won't keep my mouth shut. I'll fight back. I'm not stupid. And one of the hallmarks of contemporary life is what I perceive to be a conspiracy against conscious thought. Every aspect of government at every level has conspired to minimize education and to punish any individual or group that chooses to experience the full benefits of the First Amendment. the contemporary message -- the subtext of contemporary life -- is keep your fucking mouth shut and be a drone. And government is set up in such a way now with its complete disregard for the value of education that they're going to perpetuate a type of stupidity that makes it possible to have an entire nation of people watching late-night infomercials on TV with their phone-in credit card. How else could such things exist, if it weren't for the disastrous state of education in America?

Is this an historical norm or a worsening trend?

Once you start this particular spiral, it goes only down, because once a couple of generations have gone through this American education mill, these people as adults will never be likely to fund an improvement in the system, because they hated it while they went through it, because basically it ripped their brains out, and now they have children, and their children have to go through it, too. But they don't want to take time out of their busy schedule or spend their precious cash that they were saving up for their recreational vehicle or whatever it is to finance a bond issue to make a school better.

What do you think happened in this country?

Well, two important things, and each one of them has only three letters: One was LSD, a chemical which is capable of turning a hippie into a yuppie, one of the most dangerous chemicals known to mankind. And the other is MBA. When people started taking MBA seriously, that was the beginning of the ruination of the American industrial society. When all decisions are based on an MBA's concept of numerical reality, you're in deep shit, because the only thing that can be judged as real is that which can be proved by a column of figures. And when all aesthetic decisions are turned over to these kinds of people, who use these criteria to make steering decisions for a company with no regard for people and no regard for what the product really is, and the only thing that matters is maximizing your profit, you have a problem. Because you can't have quality then; you cannot have excellence. Quality's expensive. I think most of these people that come from business schools have the desire to make sure everything is cheesy. That's what happens when you do things that way.

Do you think this problem permeates all establishments?

I think it's specifically an American type of thing.

Do you think we'll succeed in spreading it worldwide?
I'm very upset about what's happening in Russia and in Eastern Europe, with this new change-over to Western-style economies. They are the ones who are the most vulnerable to this kind of chicanery, because all of these so-called experts that are going in there to help them set up their new economies are people from this MBA school of thought. And having visited these areas and seen what great culture they have, it saddens me to see that now it's all going to die. And it's all going to be stopped by the MBA mentality. There's only one thing that's worse than our exploitation by so-called financial experts. That's evangelical missionary work. These two things are the most anti-cultural acts that a nation can take against another nation.
Go in and "fix" them up.
Yeah. On one hand, you have the arrogance of economists who believe that because their column of figures adds up, the infliction of this technique on another culture is something that is going to create a benefit. Well, I think that's going to be proven very wrong in the Eastern Bloc countries.
How quickly?
Within five years. I don't know if it'll revert into a more socialistic system. It's really a nightmare for that part of the world. In the past, the nightmare was the authoritarian nature of communism. I think the statistic in the Soviet Union showed that every third person worked in the KGB. That's a big fuckin' payroll. But it's full employment. They have grown accustomed to a world in which some sort of government agency looks out for every aspect of their social well-being. And all of that has vanished. Now put yourself in their shoes. Suppose you had to change overnight to another system. And every benefit, small as it might be, from the American government was suddenly nonfunctional. It's gone. You'd be totally baffled. You'd be looking for a way to get back to something that gave you a feeling of security and a reason for going to work the next day. The people I've met over there are not just interested in money. Of course they like to own things -- they want a better car, a better house, all that kind of normal stuff. But they also have an appreciation for their culture, and they don't want to see it vanish just because there's no way to fund it. I'll give you an example of what has happened -- the most ridiculous one. The revolution in Czechoslovakia was conducted mainly by artists and students. It was an artistic revolution. Under the old system, if you were an artist or something like that, you got a salary, you could work or do your craft. Now this switch-over is starting. Under the new system, there's no cash for any of that. And if you perform in some sort of activity that is language-dependent, you're sunk. In other words, if you're a painter, you can export. If you're a musician, you can export. If you're a dancer, you can export. But if you're an actor or a writer, and you're functioning in the Czech or Hungarian or Russian language, it's hard for you to export. These are the people who caused this revolution in the first place, and they don't get paid anymore! Think they're not sitting around going, "Wait a minute, what the fuck did we just do here?"
Omitting details like that seems to be a continuation of a strange new phenomenon where we have CNN presenting spectacular world events as though they're the football game of the week. We assume everything's hunky-dory when there's some Big Climax like the dismantling of the Berlin Wall or Tiananmen Square, and then we turn on the next World Crisis like the Iraqi war, where we have Bernard Shaw telling us of missiles going overhead, but then in the end we get no body counts or anything, no real information. I don't understand what all this "communication" is about that we're having these days.
Want me to explain it to you?
Yeah.
Okay. Well, thanks to democracy, we now have a freely elected Fascist government in the

United States, elected by just plain folks -- same people you graduated from high school with.

How big is the work that you're composing for the Frankfurt Festival? Is it several little pieces?

They asked for 20 minutes of music to be divided into four or five sections, but it's not just the one piece, because what I've designed is a whole evening's worth of entertainment, including some older pieces that have been re-orchestrated for this particular group, and pieces from the Synclavier. For the concerts, we will be joined onstage by a Canadian dance troupe called La La La Human Steps. They're quite unbelievable. The other thing that's going to be interesting about the presentation is the six-channel P.A. system. I don't think anybody's ever heard anything quite like this in a live situation. It's set up with a stereo pair in the front, a stereo pair in the middle, and a stereo pair in the rear.

That concept is really going to change sound a lot.

Well, it won't, because in order to listen to something in six channels, you need a six-channel source, which means a six-channel mix. Now, who can do that? Any recording artist could do it, if they wanted to do the same kind of setup in their house, if they're working on their album, after they finish their stereo mix, they might want to do a six-channel mix. It can be done, but most of the artists would be too lazy. They're not even curious about it.

Whether or not it becomes popular as a consumer setup, the possibilities seem to open up the whole art of composing beyond simply picking cool notes or neat samples.

Yeah. Considering the sophistication of today's audio consumer, once you get to the point that you like the sound of CDs and vinyl is an aberration, then you're ready to go the next step, which is to have an audio environment rather than just music-minus-tape-hiss. This is never going to be something for people's homes, because most people don't live in places where you can install this without starting a civil war with either your parents or your neighbors. There are already people banging on the walls if you play your hi-fi too loud with two speakers. What the fuck are they going to do if someone installs one of these? What I would like to see happen with it is to have concert halls designed to accommodate performance of six-channel playback, whether it's a six-channel miked ensemble, or pre-recorded material in six-channel. But to have some kind of an installation where people can come and hear it. It could even be like a coffeehouse-type thing, where you have a conversation while surrounded by a composition. That might be a nice environment. That's feasible. I understand that in Japan, at a Kyoto exposition, they had a multi-channel playback system. But it opens up the possibility of special suites in hotels or, if you can imagine, an audio spa.

The potential of it reminds me of an historic place in Vienna called the Havelka. It's a coffee shop that has been there since Schubert, I guess, and the main entertainment is newspapers on a stick, and a little classical music in the background, and every known form of coffee and Viennese crullers -- little pastry things with some powdered sugar sprinkled on top. This place is so bizarre, because there's not that much conversation, just people reading newspapers on a stick. It's owned by this old woman named Mrs. Havelka, who's been running it since birth, I think, and the walls are covered with things from famous composers and authors who paid their bill by writing "graphic currency." Vienna's funny that way. Apparently Wagner stayed at the Hotel Imperial one time, and to pay his bill he handed over some pages from *Parsifal* that are still on the wall in the coffee shop. The guy who was the promoter for the first Mothers Of Invention concert in Vienna was this guy named Joachim Lieben -- otherwise known as Joey Love, the guy with the perpetual ski tan. Joey was not only the only rock and roll promoter in town, he was also on the board of directors of [music publisher] Universal Editions. For me, going to Vienna was like [*dramatically*] "12-Tone Country." A music store in Vienna means there are scores

in the window, and I was out of my mind! You can walk down the street, and suddenly here's a little shop with Webern scores in the window. So Joey was the guy who took us over there, because he was split between two worlds. He was bringing in rock groups but at the same time promoting classical concerts, and on the board of this modern music publishing concern.

Will he be involved in the concerts in September?

No, the promoter in September -- this group has been in existence for ten years, and the guy who did the most to organize and put them on the map was Karsten Witt. He had a real talent for organization and helped them make a deal to get an industrial building on the outskirts of Frankfurt, which is their permanent laboratory. It's fantastic what they've done to it: triple-walled rehearsal studios, a climate-controlled basement full of percussion equipment of every description, a massive collection of really good professional equipment, individual rehearsal halls, a small auditorium for press conferences and recitals on the ground floor. The third-floor offices are all modern office equipment and communications, and the top floor is a concert hall with a 20-foot ceiling with windows that look out over Frankfurt on the top of this industrial building out in cement-plant country, and that's their facility. Anyway, Karsten helped them put this together. When the project first began Karsten was about to turn over the reins to Andreas Mölich-Zebhauser, who's the director now, because Karsten got the job of being the director of the Vienna Festvolker. So when he went to Vienna part of his concert schedule for 1992 was to bring in the Ensemble with my project.

A building like that must be very expensive. They must be well funded.

Well, they share the building with a group called the Junge Deutsche Philharmonie, which is really their orchestra but it's all young non-professionals. Part of the money comes from the city of Frankfurt, and the rest of it comes from their concert revenues. They have records, but they're all on small, obscure European labels.

They must be really pulling people in to survive on concert revenues.

If they do 2,000 people a night, it's a major turnout. I think for modern music, even though it's supported more in Europe than it is here, still if you get more than 500 people at a concert you're doing something special, because there are just too many other things to attract the concert dollar. But this year's budget for the Frankfurt Festival, which is the overall umbrella in which this event is occurring, I think is $6.7 million for the month. And for that amount they have to mount all these concerts for Cage, Stockhausen, my stuff, and I think Knaifel. It's a week for each composer, and it coincides with what would have been Cage's 80th birthday.

There's no American city that would ever raise six million dollars for something like this.

Yeah, and you also have to realize that during this same period of time many other German cities have their own fucking festival going on with equal budgets. Cologne's probably got something just as big and just as elaborate. Berlin has something simultaneously. In fact, one of the orchestras in Berlin is playing my music at the same time. Also during that week in Frankfurt, the Junge Deutsche Philharmonie is playing "Bogus Pomp" after the Ensemble dates.

The series of concerts will be a gratifying honor. Are you looking forward to it, or dreading it?

Well, both, because this is probably the most complicated concert music project I've ever been involved in. The logistics of it are staggering. And there are budgetary constraints. I mean, if this was rock and roll, and you were going to go out to do all this stuff, you know you could sell a lot of seats, and you could make a lot of money, and you could do a lot of things if you took that money and turned it back into the production. But when you're dealing with a 2,500-seat hall and this kind of music, the economic structure is not the same.

Do you have to pay for a lot of this?
No. As a matter of fact, for the first time in history, ladies and gentlemen, they have paid me. And they've paid me enough money that I have been able to work on this thing for about a year. But that's just for delivering to them notes on paper. The problems arise when you start trying to figure out how to make the thing sound the way it's supposed to sound in these environments and pick it up and move it to two other locations. Andreas Mölich-Zebhauser, the director of the Ensemble, has been going around Europe trying to find the extra financing to make all this happen. And if he does not succeed in doing that, we'll have to find some kind of a Plan B. [*Ed. Note: According to our sources at Barking Pumpkin, Plan A was enacted, thanks to the Alte Oper and Siemens Cultural Program, among other funding sources.*]

How much impact do daily events, small or large, have on your work as an artist?
In terms of the news or in terms of what happens around the house?

The birth of children, the news, whatever.
Well, they both have an impact. If I see something that really pisses me off, there's no way I can shake it off. It'll either keep me from working altogether or send me in a blind rage to the Synclavier. Some things are just so depressing that I Can't work at all. I'll just go to sleep. I'll just have to sleep it off, because it's like having a mountain of bad vibes dumped on you.

Some artists claim that there should be a separation between themselves and those sort of things, as though they can remove themselves from whatever they're doing.
Who are these artists? What an important question to ask before you buy their album!

What sort of sociological "lemming effect" do you see in the rise of the guitar superhero?
I don't have a speech I make about this, but my observation is that guitar playing as currently understood has more to do with sports than it has to do with music. It's an Olympic-challenge type of situation. the challenges are in the realm of speed, redundancy, choreography, and grooming.

I remember an historical theory stating that the end of any century usually was marked by terrific declines in everything from arts to politics. As we careen toward the year 2000, do you think there's some sort of planetary "trigger" that goes off and creates bizarre phenomena like guitar superheroes who just play as fast as they possibly can?
I don't think that the guitar superhero mentality is an evil unto itself. We have to go back to the real evil, the MBA mentality, because this phenomenon could not proliferate if it weren't being manufactured, widely distributed, and supported by enormous industrial forces. Otherwise it would be just laughable. You can't look at something like that, which on its face is truly laughable, and laugh at it when so many people with so much money are taking it so seriously. And that's the message that goes out to the next generation of "guitar heroes." In a way, it's like the message in those ads which you'll see if you ever watch television during the daytime to find out what women get to see for commercials. In the middle of the Sally Jessie Raphael show, there are all these commercials for lawyers who will be happy to sue your employer because you felt stress. Have you ever seen these things? One commercial shows a happy couple -- you -- on the bow of a yacht clinking champagne glasses together because you had the wisdom and fortitude to dial this number and sue your employer because you experienced stress.

In the "Guitar Clone" article you did for *Guitar Player*, you stated that the entire population, even guitar players, "has been transmuted into a reasonably well-groomed, odor-free consumer amoeba that is kept alive only to service manufacturers and lives its life by the motto: biggest, fastest, loudest, mostest, and best." What a motto. What's a motto that you wish we could substitute?
I think we should avoid mottos. Mottos are what you're left with when society becomes

freeze-dried. If you can reduce everything to a motto, you're in deep shit. I mean, that's the message. We are in deep shit. And it's getting deeper, and nobody wants to bail it.

How do we get out of this, Mr. Frank?

I don't think we're getting out. I think that we must adapt. The human organism is fairly flexible, and the United States is being transformed into something truly hideous, and those who wish to continue to live here and function as Americans are going to have to find some way to adapt. You're going to have to find a way to drink foul water, breathe foul air, eat semi-poisonous and/or non-foods, and find some way to keep a job so that you can spend money to experience the thrill of these things.

Sounds pretty exciting.

Well, that's evolution. We have evolved to this. Look, every senior citizen who's asking, "What's going to happen to my benefits?" can think back to the days when they told little Sonny, "Be a lawyer; it's a good job," because these are the people who went out and did their job and found ways to make their job pay better by creating more laws that were even more baffling, that caused the average person to need them. So when you have a society that is addicted to lawyers, addicted to credit, addicted to stupidity, with nowhere to go and nobody to sell it to, what do you call that? I mean, is that *Apocalypse Now* or what?

Lorin Hollander says that some of your music is painfully beautiful. I don't know if you hear it that way. And even in your instrumental music, where we don't have the words going on, you put humor in the liner notes. Is that coming out of this political feeling you have, or is it an organizational element whereby you're creating a contrast between something very moving and something very funny, or is it to keep these sort of emotions at a distance, or am I intellectualizing too much?

I think you're intellectualizing too much. You can reduce it to this -- you can ask this question: Is it possible to laugh while fucking? I think yes.

What about the issue of the ethics of sampling? At what point does the line become gray?

I think that, aesthetically, a case can be made in both directions. If there was really some superbly artistic reason for taking massive chunks of James Brown albums, or whatever it is that you're stealing to create this unique new collage that required a wholesale chunk of James Brown texture in order for you to do your art, then I think James Brown ought to get paid, and James Brown's record company, which actually owns the copyright on the master or the chunk of the master that's used, they ought to get paid. And if you can't do your art without stealing chunks of James Brown, and you don't want to pay James Brown, then find some other art to do.

How long has it been since you've played guitar?

A long time.

Do you fiddle anymore?

Well, I keep one sitting by my chair in the studio, and when there's some boring mechanical process going on, I'll pick it up and plink a few notes on it, but I don't really play it. I just touch it every once in a while.

All the years that you were considered a great guitar player, were you trying to be a guitar hero, or were you using it merely as a musical tool?

I like music, and the guitar just happened to be the instrument that I play, rather than piano or accordion or bugle. I was never really a guitar fetishist, and all the stuff that goes along with the guitar-hero mentality is alien to me.

Do you think you've lost your skills, aside from having your calluses turn to marshmallows?

I don't think I can play anymore. I don't have any motivation to play. I don't have any backing group that would allow me to do the kinds of things that I do. They're begging me to do something in this show in Germany, and that's one of the things that I dread, because I think the audience will probably be expecting it, too. And it's difficult to go

onstage with just a little stick in your hand and no guitar after 25 or 30 years of doing it the other way. So that's going to be hard. It depends on what you're trying to do on the guitar. I mean, if you know how to play chords, it's not likely that you're going to forget all the chords. But improvising a solo comes from places in your brain or someplace else in your body that can be adversely affected. And I don't feel right playing guitar. It's an uncomfortable feeling.

How do you view yourself in the world of music? Do you have a sense of place vis-à-vis other serious composers?

Well, yes: basically, that I don't belong [*laughs*].

There's nobody like you. Nobody does anything like what you do.

That's true, so therefore... what? Three dots...

How did that happen?

My taste was just different.

From early childhood on.

Yeah.

And you had the good sense to listen to yourself rather than to other people. That's a unique characteristic and must somehow be tied into being a successful artist.

Today the most successful artists never listen to themselves. They always listen to the managers of the corporations that keep them going. Because, in today's world, if you afford yourself the luxury of following your own artistic whims, you'll be out of a contract. You'll no longer have that tennis shoe endorsement or that soft drink endorsement. You'll be a bad person. You'll be forgotten. You'll be stacked up with Flock Of Seagulls and name the next one. You'll be on the rack with those guys. Everybody is so well-behaved today.

Do you think that there might be people sitting out there working as night clerks in motels writing symphonies that will never be heard? Or have even those people finally given up?

I think there are still probably a few left. And I only say that because of the mathematical probabilities that, evil as the current system is, it's not so efficient that it can kill us all. there are a few stragglers out there. You'll never hear what they do, though. That's the problem. Unless you can hear music by reading it off paper.

You don't think a scenario might unfold in the future like in the past, when Felix Mendelssohn found a ream of paper with notes on it, which turned out to be the works of Bach, who had been forgotten for the prior hundred years? Do you think there's any future hope for excavation of these motel music writers?

No, because it's tied to economics. Look at it mechanically. In a society where the economic system sets aside money to finance cultural activities, maybe. In a society that is based purely on profit versus cost, the mathematical probabilities of anything like that happening, ever, are so small as to be not worth considering. Let me contrast just this one other thing. One of the best-kept secrets in American life is the attendance annually at museums by the American people. More people go to museums every year than attend football and baseball combined. It's the best-kept secret in this country. The desire of the average person to consume something other than shit is there, but the people do not control the hand that turns the crank that redirects the river of shit in their direction. They have no control over these guys who have made the decision that this is what they want, and this what they'll get. And they'll get more of it, and the flow will never stop. But I don't think that the American species is so debased that they have given up on all hope of a cultural life. It's just that they have no concept of how to achieve it or really understand why it's worth preserving. And that's what's so sad about museum attendance, because stuff in a museum is dead. It's cultural necrophilia. A museum should exist, yeah; you should go and see the past, you should see that treasured little thing -- whatever it is. But that's like the mentality of the guy who wanted to shut down the patent office in the early 1900s

because it was the official government point of view that everything had already been invented.

There's a part of me that wants to believe that somehow there will be a great sweeping away of all these forces of ignorance and evil, and these people who long for something that uplifts their spirit or entertains their eye and ear will get what they want.

Well, right now, the desire to consume that stuff -- the *need* -- is being fulfilled on a local and regional and even domestic level by people recording things on little home studios for their own amusement and the amusement of their friends. That's the equivalent of the guy in the motel writing the symphony. It's the guy with his little Fostex making his own demos even though he's never going to get a contract. And it's like the revolution in home video. People are shooting what they want to see -- basically, themselves fucking.

I keep thinking of your comment about attendance at museums, and I keep wondering about the contempt that somebody must hold for the American public, of what they would or wouldn't enjoy hearing, or seeing, or doing.

It's more than just contempt. The people who make these decisions don't even care about the public at all. It's beyond contempt for them. They have a special agenda, anything status quo, which means maintaining the current administration. They'll put up with whatever they can handle in Congress, but the idea is to subjugate the population. All ideas have to be subjugated, behavior has to be subjugated. And the problem is if it were an ingenious policy and somebody found an ingenious way to inflict the policy, then everything might be sort of okay. But what you've got is a really stupid policy with an ingenious way of inflicting it. They're much better at the methodology of inflicting suppression than they are in coming up with a creative policy that is worth inflicting on the public.

What my naïveté prevents me from understanding is how this mechanism evolved, and what the breeding process is that gives us the officials or bureaucrats or politicians that enforce and perpetuate it.

For one thing, there was this entity created by Ronald Reagan called the Department of Domestic Diplomacy. If you look in the Iran-Contra manual, you'll find out.

This is not a joke.

It's not a joke. The guy that he put in charge of running this thing had no address, no phone number. You couldn't call the Washington directory and get the number of the Department of Domestic Diplomacy. The guy who ran it was Otto Reich, who used to be the head of dis-information for the CIA. You should get the Iran-Contra thing and look it up in the table of contents. I had heard a rumor about this thing. I couldn't believe that it was real. I went on C-SPAN and talked about it. And I started getting phone calls from people saying, "Yeah, it is real." And one guy faxed me the actual pages from the Iran-Contra book that had the whole story of this thing in there. And as far as I know, it was never disbanded. The thing still exists, unless there's been a miracle. It's just like Cointelpro under Nixon. Cointelpro was what they were trying to hide with Watergate. It wasn't just breaking into the Democratic headquarters. What they're trying to cover up is the fact that Nixon had decided to create a secret police. There was no legal authority to spy on U.S. citizens. He felt he had enemies everywhere, so he created a program called Cointelpro. It was all the domestic spying on political groups, people he perceived as enemies. And since it couldn't exist under law, it had to be financed by a slush fund.

He went out to investors?

There were plenty of investors for Nixon. For example, a lot of people don't realize that Marcos gave him 15 million dollars. If you've got a right-wing fascist idea, there's plenty of people who will give you money to pull it off.

Was this going to operate somehow under Nixon or under the CIA, or the FBI?

I think that it was a stand-alone operation, but under the jurisdiction of the Justice

Department. It was so corrupt, and it was such an affront to democracy, and most people don't realize it already happened. The other thing that happened under Reagan is that in the early part of his administration, he signed a presidential order, a presidential finding, a directive that finally gave the CIA legal permission to spy on U.S. citizens.

Is this still in effect?

Yes. It was done as part of the war of drugs.

That's scary. How do you get so informed on this?

People send me stuff. I look at every different news source that I can find, and read between the lines, and the rest of the time you watch C-SPAN, and every news story that comes on raises a question. The first question is, why is that story on and not something else? And then what about the spin? You know, when they tell you a story, how are they spin-doctoring it?

Tell us about your phone call to Edgard Varèse.

I had received for my 15th birthday $5, and -- although I had never made a long-distance call before -- I thought that maybe for $5 I could make a call to that mysterious place Greenwich Village, to call Varèse. And my mother said okay. And he wasn't there. He was in Brussels getting the "Poem Electronique" ready for the World's Fair. But I did speak with his wife. And I've spoken to her a couple of times on the phone.

Did you learn anything that was important to you, other than just to make the call?

Well, what are you really going to learn? What's a composer's wife going to tell you? She was a nice lady. She was kind to take the call. They lived on Sullivan Street in the Village. It was a nice place. It had a red lacquer door. When we moved to New York in '67, we had this miserable fucking apartment on Thompson Street, but it was a block away from Varèse's house. He was already dead by that time, but I used to walk by there and see that little red door and just try to imagine what it would be like to be trapped in that apartment not writing music for 25 years.

You mentioned once that you were sometimes influenced by sidemen. How much do people really influence you?

If you find out that there is a person who can play a certain instrument, and do things on that instrument that are unique, you're always tempted to write something specifically for that individual.

Like with Vinnie Colaiuta?

He's a perfect example. He's a truly unique individual.

In his rhythmic ability to hear more than a *one*-two-three-four, *one*-two-three-four?

Yeah. And to play it with style and attitude. Attitude is a prime commodity in music today, but this is one of the guys who invented attitude.

Where did the title Barking Pumpkin come from?

That's an easy one. Gail used to smoke. She quit. But she used to smoke Marlboros, and she coughed all the time. And so I had always referred to her as my pumpkin, and so at that point she was a barking pumpkin.

Since you said you haven't played guitar in so long, my impression of you over the last many years is of an extraordinarily serious composer locked away late at night typing away on a Synclavier. Do you know any other composers who have done as much continuous work as you on a Synclavier?

I don't know too many composers who can afford them. There's a guy named Herb Pilhoffer in Minneapolis who has a setup twice as big as mine, mainly because he's doing these commercial things and some film scoring. I've never met him, but my assistant [Todd Yvega] used to work for him and told me about his setup. There may be some Synclavier setups in some universities with some students using them. But as far as composers of any kind of repute that have this system or anything like it, I don't think so. Because it's not just a stand-alone system. you can't just buy one and then do it, because in order to reproduce it and capture what it does, you virtually need to plug it into a recording studio.

You mentioned once that your Synclavier was unable to stop and play from any given point. Is that still a problem, or did they fix it?
That particular thing was making it play from any given point from the music-printing page. And they are no longer supporting their music-printing software. I think they fired everybody who wrote their music-printing software. The company is basically going the direction of selling the system to the world of film and television. They use the sound-effects inserting device. And although it wasn't originally touted as a musical instrument and a composer's tool, I think that their bread is being buttered by the entertainment industry now.
So you won't get this issue taken care of.
Not unless I go out and hire the guy who wrote the music software and tell him to come in and fix this. We're using [Coda] Finale software. It runs on a Mac, is MIDI-interfaceable, and graphically it mops the floor with the Synclavier's music printing. It's probably the most complicated piece of musical software I've ever seen. I mean, I own it, but I still can't work it. Ali Askin, the copyist for the Ensemble, wanted to use it in order to prepare the scores for Frankfurt, so I let him go out and buy a copy. He learned to work it in about a week. How, I'll never know, because there are three incredibly dense, tiny-print manuals on this thing that are absolutely baffling.
The idea was that if I got a copy of the software, too, then I could do a MIDI dump by using this new feature on the Synclavier. I can take my sequences, transfer them via the MIDI port into Finale, and then send him floppies of the Synclavier stuff so he can manipulate the pictorial data in Germany. I had to buy the software just to set up this communication link with him. We installed it, but I've never even attempted to use it. The first thing I did was have my assistant, Todd Yvega, who is a real computer whiz, try to figure out how the damn thing worked. And when I saw him pulling his hair out, I said, "This is not for me. I'll get too frustrated." Let me give credit where credit is due. Todd is really Mr. Synclavier. The other guy whom I regard as a major talent and a major asset in preparing the work that I'm doing now is the new recording engineer, Spence Chrislu. And this other guy who makes sure that everything works is Dave "The Tree Hugger" Dondorf. So between Dave, Spence, Todd, and myself, when we all get together and all the equipment is working, we can rule the world! The days on which everybody's here and all the equipment is working are so few and far between, I think the world is still very safe.
When computer technology reaches a point where people can start using their finger or a pen to write things, would you switch back from typing in notes into writing in notes again, only now on computer screens?
Well, I have to go back to dots on paper because it seems that since I cannot operate Finale, and there are some strategic limitations to the Synclavier software, in order to prepare the composition for the Ensemble Modern, the easiest way to make some of this stuff happen is to just go back to dots. For this, I had to get special glasses made, because the normal ones that I use were the focal length between my head and the CRT, and are therefore useless. It's the hunched-over-monk work position on a table, so I had to get these mondo-magnifiers.
I've been reading about a rising interest in country music at the same time that there's a rising interest in rap. Are there racist components at work here, or is this all media hype?
Anything that appears in multiple locations on fronts of magazines which are basically owned or affiliated with record companies and broadcasters, I think you can count on smelling a rat.
You mentioned once in an interview that one of the sad things for young people is that they no longer have venues in which to hear improvisation.
Yeah. And since most of the best improvisation was never photographed or videotaped, if they're raised in a world where the interest of a musical nature is tied only to the question

of, "Is there a video of it?" kids will never get a chance to hear what it was. If it is no longer fashionable to listen to music, if your peer group only watches music, and if you're old-fashioned and you listen to music, then you could lose status by being a mere listener. The trend today is to be a music-viewer-slash-dance-participant.

Are we seeing an era in which even the phenomenon of listening to music will give way to some other fad like the Duncan yo-yo men and ballroom dancers and vaudevillian jugglers?

That even sounds like a kind demise.

You think it will be more brutal?

Since music exists now at the whim of corporate sponsorship, the temptation to create musical divisions at corporations who prey upon these consumers is going to be very strong. In other words, the trend I see is towards a Coca-Cola concert division, a Pepsi-Cola concert division, a Nike concert division, a you-name-it concert division, where the type of music required to help sell their products is nurtured in a test tube and then foisted onto the consumer world with the whole control, cooperation, and financial backing of the manufacturer who stands to benefit from it.

Do you see the same scary, depressing future for metropolitan orchestras as well? They already play Beethoven's *Fifth* every season.

What could be more scary than their existence right now? What's more scary than being in that orchestra where you never do anything other than that? Except die.

How many orchestras do you know that are able to even expand their repertoire? Kent Nagano was the first conductor that I ever heard of trying to do something semi-strange.

Well, Kent is also a unique individual. This is a chance-taking, weirdo, outside guy. He's not a normal orchestral conductor. He's being very successful, more successful in Europe than here, because that's where the action is. Take for example this project that I'm doing. There's no way it could ever be done in the United States. No group would ever come to me and offer me the amount of money that would enable me to work on it for a year.

How is your next album coming along?

I finally finished disc one of the *Civilization: Phaze III* album, which is something that I've been promising for years and years. Most likely, it's going to be a double CD. But the thing that's unique about this album is, it combines the people inside the piano that were on *Lumpy Gravy*, except that on *Lumpy Gravy* there was just this smidgen of what was actually recorded with them. I've had these tapes since 1967 and have extensively edited all this semi-random conversation together into little scenes that form the bridges between the Synclavier pieces that are the bulk of the album. And it's pretty astonishing.

How long were they in that piano?

Twenty years.

And then you let them out?

Well, you can't make them stay, and you don't want them in there unless they're being entertaining. And so it started to become a trendy thing to do at this particular studio. Like the receptionist out there would go, "They're in there in the piano again, ha ha ha." And the next thing you know, she's one of the people in the piano. So the cast of characters that wandered in and out of the piano covered everybody from Motorhead and [bass guitarist] Roy Estrada to the sister of the guy who owned the recording studio to Monica the Albanian receptionist to bunches of other people whose names I can't even remember. They just happened to be there, and I said, "Do you want to go in the piano?" And they said, "Yes."

Sounds like a microcosm of America once again. Did you listen to all of the hours of this stuff?

Absolutely. And I've been listening to it since 1967. This is a process of creating stylized poetry using digital editing techniques. You know how hard it is to edit any material that's

ambient using a razor blade? You can't make it sound right. But thanks to the Sonic Solutions, you can do these cross-fade edits where the resonance of the piano does not cut off and the people who were not even in the piano on the same day would talk to each other or answer each other back in some strange conversation. Without Sonic Solutions, I couldn't have put this thing together. It was truly a project that had to wait for technology to catch up and make it possible. So not only do we have these smooth transitions from different days and different groups of people inside the piano, but they also blend seamlessly into the Synclavier pieces. So the piano overhang, which would be the result of voices setting the strings in motion, will be overhanging the start of the Synclavier piece, and the last chord of a piece will be ringing off into the piano as they come in talking again.

Were the Synclavier sections composed after listening to all this older material, or had you been sketching them out all along?

You've got to understand what the Synclavier process is like, as opposed to writing for any other medium. Imagine being a sculptor, okay? And imagine making your own mountain and then going to the mountain periodically and hauling your own hunks or marble back to the shop so that you can whack away on them. Sculpture is a subtractive medium, and you start off with more than you wind up with. So the analogy here is that the raw material that I'm working with is whatever is in my imagination versus what samples are at my disposal. And building the mountain is building your collection of samples. After you've recorded the individual instrument, or jackhammer, or whatever it's going to be -- you can't deploy it into a composition unless it's been captured. You know, it needs a start mark and an end mark put on it, and all this really drudgerous bookkeeping kind of stuff, which Todd does for me. So I've got far more samples on tape now than I even have access to in the Synclavier, just because it takes months to prepare the raw material. And as the new samples come on-line, they are deployed into compositions which have been worked on over periods of years. In other words, the day I start a certain composition, I have one set of samples, and it makes the composition sound a certain way. But as new sounds come along, and they're plugged into the composition, the notes may be the same, but the whole sound of the piece changes.

And so you're often rewriting material you wrote long ago. At least the notes on paper now have a different timbre.

It's not just that. I mean, when you get to hear other possibilities, you're influenced by the very process. For example, when I first bought the Synclavier, it wasn't even a sampling machine, and I started writing things for it that just used the FM synthesis. The main charm with a Synclavier at that time was the power of its sequencer and the fact that you could have multi-tracks and things colliding with each other. So some of the pieces that were started even in the pre-sampling days on the Synclavier have gone through permutations over the years and still haven't been released yet. About a month ago, we finished something that I've been working on for 10 years; it's 24 minutes long. It sounds like an orchestra piece, but it's an orchestra like you never heard before. You couldn't get an orchestra like this. Not only do you have all the normal orchestral-sounding instruments -- the piano, percussion, and the rest of that stuff -- but it has every known kind of synthesizer noise built into it, plus vocal sound effects and car sounds and all this stuff organized into basically a diatonic composition. I've been working on this thing for years and years and years, and every time a new sample comes along, it would go into this thing. That's going to be the centerpiece of the second disc. Timbre is *determined* by your samples, which is determined by your ability to purchase the samples or make them from scratch.

But the only real limitation on the machine is an "S" with two lines through it. Everything that it can do costs way too much money; since there are so few of them around, the price per pound of what it does is still way up there. In order to stay in business, the company had to make a decision to move it away from being a composer's tool to more of a sound-

effects film-business-type tool. And so they've stopped supporting the music software. They've had a lot of software updates for all the editing aspects of it, but none for maybe three years on the music-printing software. They fired the guy who wrote the printing software, so that's kind of frozen in time. The software contract is $2,500 a year, just to stay current with what they're doing. It's mostly to expedite "housekeeping," *et cetera*.
The one thing that I am kind of proud of is that I never took any foundation grant money to do any of this stuff. it was all financed from record sales. But as the record sales go down, so does the amount of money that I can turn around and reinvest into the hardware -- which has a price that's steadily rising -- and it squeezes me into a weird kind of position, because it keeps me constantly in debt to the bank to pay off loans in advance to buy the equipment that's in that room. So it's like going down on a black hole, where it'll eventually reach a singularity, and -- *poof* -- there it is. Gail does all the business. She takes care of all the stuff for the bank. She arranges for all the loans to get the equipment. The house is her project; that's her composition.

How do you catalog your samples? Is it broken down by car-bumpers-falling-off noises versus. . . .

That would be under "Industrial." It's completely broken down. Not only that, but I think we've got tens of thousands of samples by now, and you memorize their names. There's an eight-digit computer name for each of these things. I can sit there and watch the thing, and I can see the name of the sample, and I know what it sounds like. I know every one of those little bastards. I know how far it will travel on the keyboard all by itself. I know this stuff inside and out. To be able to write music for that kind of sound universe offers some major opportunities if you have the time to do all the typing to manipulate it properly. And there's never enough time at one sitting to finish something, because the more you get into it, the more you understand it could sound a lot better if it only had this nuance or that nuance. And every nuance you want to add takes hours, which then go into days which go into weeks, and on and on.
And every one of those nuances needs to be defined -- amplitude for each note, whether the note has vibrato or whether it's going to bend to the next note, all that stuff. All that has to be typed in as data. And it has to be transferred to tape, then it has to be mixed.

How do you ever know then something is done?

When I get so fucking sick of it, I go, "It's done!"

Does this ever feel like torture to you?

Oh, yeah. There are some intermediate stages that are definitely not fun.

But it's a habit you can't kick?

Yeah, that probably would be accurate. I don't think I would even want to.

As your skills increase, do you notice your music changing?

I don't know how to answer that. That's pretty subjective.

What do you feel are your greatest weaknesses?

I just can't do normal stuff.

Like?

Arithmetic.

You're talking about life skills?

Yeah, and their equivalent in music. I can't do counterpoint. I can't write traditional harmony, which would mean I would be virtually unemployable. Without me employing myself, I wouldn't have a job.

I've listened to some of your orchestral stuff and thought, "Gee, I notice he's getting rid of these sort of things I learned about in college."

I never had to get rid of them!

What are your greatest strengths?

Probably the greatest strength that I have is a sense of humor.

Your humor seems to show a real concern for the plight of human beings in a declining culture.
Well, I don't think in terms of things like "the plight of human beings," because they certainly haven't cared about my fucking plight, so why should I care about theirs? However, I think that the label of "misanthrope" is probably not right for me, and "misogynist" is not right either. The thing that interests me is the behavior. That's always been a fascinating thing to me. Whether an interest in behavior constitutes a "concern for a plight," that's subjective. But I think that it's even scientifically worthwhile to make some notes about behavior as observed. And this can lead you to speculation as to why such behavior occurs.
You once said you never got a good studio solo. Do you even try studio solos anymore?
No. I'll make one exception. I think that maybe "Sleep Dirt," for all its imperfections, is a pretty nice little solo. I've done a few guitar samples, but I probably should do more, because one of the things that would be a stimulating addition to the sample library would be a set of my guitar notes that would allow the machine to play all the shit I can't do with my fingers, and still make it kind of sound like my guitar. I'll get around to that one day.
Whatever happened to your Jimi Hendrix Miami guitar?
I gave it to Dweezil.
Is it playable?
Oh, yeah. He had it refurbished. Fender spiffed the thing back up.
Is there any type of music you hate?
There are certain things that I'm not fond of, but hate takes a lot of energy. I'm not really fond of commercial cowboy music or contemporary country -- the "Slick Willie" type of shit. And lounge music I don't enjoy.
At one time weren't you a lounge musician?
Oh yeah, I had to do that, and at the end of it I put my guitar in the case and stuck it behind the sofa and didn't touch it I guess for a year. It was nauseating.
Do you see the world of sound as just this palette to draw from, or were there things about lounge music that actually made you run screaming out of the room?
When you're adopting or adapting a style in order to tell a story, everything's fair game. You have to have the right setting to the lyric. If it's a lounge setting, then there it goes. If it's a slick country setting, then there it goes. The important thing at that point is to tell the story. But I don't think of the world of musical style as the world of sound. That's another topic altogether. That's another planet. The world of sound is back to the jackhammers and women in labor.
You quoted Stockhausen's "lazy dogmas of impossibility."
Yeah. He had presented the score of the woodwind quintet of "Zeitmasse" to some musicians who looked at all these mondo tuplets and proclaimed the piece unplayable. Then he responded that they were creating "the lazy dogma of impossibility." And one of the most accurate performances of "Zeitmasse" that I know of was a cassette that somebody gave me of a group from San Francisco that had played at a chamber music concert. The guy who conducts the San Francisco Chamber Symphony invited me up there to conduct Varèse in '83. He gave me a cassette of a performance that he had conducted of "Zeitmasse," and it was really good. The first Columbia recording was full of mistakes.
But I'll tell you something: This Ensemble Modern could play that shit with their eyes closed. In this incarnation of the group, there's an American guy living in Italy who is playing the tuba, a Swiss character, a couple of Canadians, and an Australian, but, of course, being based in Frankfurt, it's mostly German musicians. The total instrumentation for my piece was about 25. They had to add some outside musicians because they don't normally have a mandolin player. The Ensemble Modern [normally about 14 members]

has been augmented by an extra percussionist, so we have three percussion, a guitar, mandolin, two harps (one doubling piano), piano doubling celesta, five woodwinds, five strings, and seven brass. The group has been around for about 10 years, and they own themselves. They have an elected three-musician board of directors which handles the aesthetic decisions on what they're going to play and when they're going to play it. In order to be in the group, you have to be voted in every year. If you fuck up, you're out.

No tenure.

No tenure. And there's a waiting list of people who would like to be in this group. They do about 100 concerts a year all over the world, and it's a full-time job. These guys don't go out and do jingle dates, and none of them are making a lot of money from doing this. They all seem to be living pretty close to the economic borderline. About half of them go to work on bikes -- rain, sleet, or snow.

Total commitment.

And can they play! It's unbelievable.

Are they young, old, or mixed?

Mostly young.

How did you hear of this group?

I was contacted by a guy named Henning Lohner, who had a documentary about me that's never been on the air in the U.S., but it's been on in Europe. It's all about the serious-type stuff. Henning knew a guy named Dr. Dieter Rexroth, who runs the Frankfurt Festival and was the director of the Hindemith Institute in Frankfurt. Dr. Rexroth, although he doesn't speak much English, is a big fan of my stuff, and Henning suggested to him that they invite me to do something in this festival. So they sent me an economic proposal that was insufficient and I thanked them and said no. What they wanted was impossible. So about four months go by, and I get another call, and they say they really want me to be involved in this festival, and would I meet with these guys from the Ensemble Modern. Then they sent me some CDs that the group had made for some German label. And the thing that astonished me was that it was just a great album. They had recorded the music of Kurt Weill. The selections were all obscure, unique things, some of them with vocals, and the recording was great, the performance was great.

At any rate, finally we came to an agreement, and I definitely had the idea that these people really wanted to do this. I didn't realize the decision was not just coming from the director of the festival; the musicians voted to invest their time and energy in this project. The *musicians themselves* desired to do this. And so you know under those circumstances that, whatever you write, they're going to play the fuck out of it. So the next thing that happened was, I said let's construct the piece while you're here; why don't you come to Los Angeles for two weeks, and I'll rehearse with the group just like I would rehearse with a rock and roll band. And that's what happened: We did rehearsals, we recorded some improvisations, we did mass samples with the whole group and individual samples -- things that never came out of notation in any textbook, things that you could never write down on paper.

How long did they stay?

For the entire two weeks. Now here's the other thing: During all this time none of them got paid anything!

Sounds like your type of guys.

There was nothing they wouldn't try. If we were after a particular musical result, they were all for it. The classic example was they are so sound-texture-oriented that they would try anything, even abuse their instruments. The French horn players were sitting there scraping the bells of their horns across the floor, and those things are very expensive. If I had the finest Hollywood musicians, at no price could I have gotten those sounds.

And they certainly wouldn't have been that committed.

The other great noise was -- there are two people in this group who play didgeridus. One

of them is the woman from Australia who is also the oboe player. And one afternoon, I imagined this awful sound that could be created if one were to take a didgeridu and play it into a partially filled coffee pot. And I asked her whether she would do it. She said yes, and let me say, it is truly nauseating. I was laughing so much I had to leave the room.

That sounds like a great group -- fun to work with.

They're so serious. The kind of laughs that they gave are German laughs. You know what I mean? It's like there's a different kind of humor involved here. There's a different perspective on things. You can laugh, but not too much. Anyway, you know what happens if you take a little straw and blow it into a half-empty Coke bottle? Imagine a straw with a diameter of about an inch-and-a-half or two inches. It already has a wooden resonance to it. You know the noise that comes out of a didgeridu, that kind of circular-breathing-type low droning noise? If you plunged anything that would make that noise into a liquid, you get the tone and the bubbles at the same time. It's pretty nauseating, but fascinating.

How much do you feature it in the new piece? Is it just a little punctuation that comes and goes, or is it the whole theme?

She's going to have a solo.

Does she know that yet?

Oh, sure. They all -- since they were using up their vacation time to do this project -- she had to leave the day before the last day, and so I had to make sure I got all of her individual samples out of the way. I said goodbye to her and thanked her very much. And the next night, we were having our final jam session of the season. And she showed up again. She cancelled her flight, because she was having so much fun. And at the end of the thing, she said, "In all my musical life, I have never had as much fun as these two weeks working on this stuff." And I was stunned, because it was really such hard work and so many hours.

You allowed them to be so creative, and you asked them to draw upon all their skills and to expand their own borders in ways that they probably don't get a chance to do.

Well, for one thing, I wanted to find out whether they could improvise. Most of the musicians in that part of the musical world don't. And for the first time in their lives, these people got a chance to play a solo and they went from sheer terror to ecstasy.

You gave them all these opportunities. You have a reputation for being a mentor of the young and/or fosterer of unknown people's careers. How did that happen?

I think that it probably has something to do with fractals. The more I think about fractals, the more the whole idea of fractals relates closely to what I do.

How so?

Well, if you're trying to divine order out of chaos, that's a little bit presumptuous, but then on the other hand so is the concept of chaos. So I would say that the fractal theory falls in the cracks between those two attitudes. And rhythmically, if you're dividing the universe into twos and threes, which is basically what happens with all polyrhythmic subdivisions, you are to some degree missing the boat -- the fractal boat. If you can think of rhythm as an extension of the fractal universe instead of even subdivisions of twos and threes grouped into elevens and thirteens or whatever, if you can think of microsecond relationships as being valid components of polyrhythms, then you're getting closer to the way I view things. And if you can, transferring that into the anthropological domain, how I wind up being, in your words, a mentor to these kinds of people, it just seems that the odds are in my favor, that if I keep doing what I'm doing, we will meet.

You made the comment that listeners accept polyrhythms in your music and African drum music with much greater ease than they do dissonance. Why is it that harmony seems to linger around so much?

Rap music may bring an end to that. Think about it. What is so preciously consonant about spoken words? It used to be, in order to have something acceptable as broadcast material

or even listenable material, it had to be saturated with consonance. And although rap music is not dealing with harmonic combinations of major and minor seconds, it is certainly dealing in dissonance.

That's true. You've done a lot with spoken material, too, such as that thing with Steve Vai tracking your voice.

Oh, on "Dangerous Kitchen"? Yeah, where he wrote the -- well, I'd have to call it a scat because there's no other word for it. It's on that and "Jazz Discharge Party Hats." He transcribed it and then learned it on the guitar and then played it on the record. But I think that the other, better example of spoken material would be something like "Dumb All Over."

Why is it okay to hear really strange rhythms but not to hear really strange harmonies?

Well, arguing the other position, people *do* assimilate really strange harmonies when they are accompanied by the appropriate image.

Do you mean like in horror-movie music when the maniacal slasher is about to come?

Exactly.

It's got to be visually triggered.

Well, the society has been so saturated with visual data, and the audio that goes along with those pictures stays in your tissue, kind of like dioxin. And you hear the slasher music, you know what slasher texture is, you know slasher harmony [*laughs*]. And if you hear anything that sounds like slasher harmony, and there's no slasher, you're still going to feel the slasher.

Then the question becomes, have the visual media people created the proper image to go with the sound?

Well, if I were going to do a slasher movie, I could be a lot scarier than the shit that they stick in there. I thought that the pinnacle, the thing that everybody has gone for since it was established as a slasher norm, was the *squeak squeak squeak* from *Psycho*. Most film scoring for tense moments runs the gamut from *squeak squeak squeak* to the filter opening up on the Minimoog on the low note. Not too much in between there.

How do you think Schubert would feel knowing that the *Unfinished Symphony* is the Smurfs' theme?

Well, how do you think that the people in America would feel if they knew where the Smurfs came from? They were an advertising device for British Petroleum. When we went to Holland for the first time with the band with Mark and Howard in '70 or '71, the whole place was riddled with fuckin' Smurfs advertising BP. And the joke in the band was "Smurf mee," because on the billboards that's what they said. "Smurf me" spelled "me-e-e." I don't know what it means. But to go from that to what we now have as a family of Smurfs with their own personalities. According to Ahmet, who saw this spectacle on television, he witnessed an interview with a guy who was one of the Smurf voices, taking himself so seriously that it beggared description. I mean, he did about a five-minute routine on this guy.

There's our cultural hero. And again it gets me back thinking of guitar heroes, and why they are gunslingers. In your touring days with rock bands, did you see guys out there playing air guitar?

Sure.

What is that, and how come girls don't do it?

Well, because their tits get in the way, for one thing -- same reason why you don't see that many girl guitar players unless they're handling it at a low altitude. But I think it's probably because girls are too smart to play air guitar. If ever there was something that the women's liberation movement could use to prove the inferiority of the male species, it's the extremely low number of women who play air guitar.

We haven't talked about your business. As I understand it, you and Gail handle everything.
In the house, we have three offices. We've got one upstairs in the bedroom where I do all the liner notes and that kind of word-processing stuff. Gail has an office, and then there's another office just as you come in the gate that we use for all the phone transactions and that kind of stuff. We have a lab, we have a studio, we have an editing facility, three vaults for tape and film. That's all right here where we live. There's two other buildings in the San Fernando Valley. One of them is Joe's Garage, which is a rehearsal facility. And then there's our warehouse, where all the equipment and stuff comes out of. Gail runs all that.
Why did you decide to handle all these things yourselves?
Well, I would say there's a certain hose-job factor in there, but in reality it's just good business sense.
What's in that huge vault downstairs?
Since the early '70s, I've collected every interview, every performance clip, everything that was done around the world that I could get a copy of. Then there's all the rest of the footage from *Baby Snakes*, the accounts of every documentary that was done in Europe and everyplace else, and then there's videotape -- every format from two-inch to digital video and all stops in between. Plus all the masters, all the road tapes, and all of the 1/4" tapes from Cucamonga. The audio tapes go back to '55.
So early on you were very careful about keeping thing and keeping them in order.
Well, being a pack rat is something, but keeping it in order is another thing.
In other words, it's a hellacious chore for someone.
Well, the vault is very well organized. And I know where stuff is, but nobody else does. In order to put it in a condition where anybody could go in there and find anything anytime they needed it, it would take about a year and a bar-code generator. Even a student intern wouldn't know what the fuck to do with it, because many of the road tapes have never even been listened to. They are still gaffered shut just the way they came off the road. And in order to log it, you've got to listen to it. And what intern is even going to know what he's hearing? And the mental notes that I have about what's on those tapes is not only what the tunes are, but where the good versions are. And your only other option to leaving the stuff scattered like that is to go through the arduous process of making logs of everything, clip the good takes out, collate them, and start yet another library.
Does it frustrate you that it's impossible to do all of these things as fast as you would want to?
Yes. Let me put it to you another way. If I could, I'd keep my studio running 24 hours a day. For some of those things that need to be done on the studio level, I don't need to be in the control room with the engineer. I could just give instructions, and because the board is automated, once you've done a mix, if anything needs to be changed in the mix, all he's got to do is go back and tweak a couple of faders and rerun it, and no time is lost. But this engineer that I'm working with, Spence, is a mutant, because not only does he understand old analog technology -- he's still a vinyl guy at home, and he's one of these guys that likes tube amplifiers and all this kind of stuff -- but he knows how to operate all of the digital recording equipment. He understands the Sonic Solutions, and he can even operate that aspect of the Synclavier that interfaces with the recording machines. In other words, I could leave him alone. I could say, "Call up this sequence, do this, this, this, and this," and he knows how to run all these things.
Now there's not too many recording engineers that I know of that have a hands-on experience with all this gear and do it right. And he's got real good ears for balancing things. I would need three guys like that in order to run three eight-hour shifts in there. And I feel lucky that I can get him four days a week, ten hours a day. But you know at the end of the day when he's got to go back to his wife, I'm sitting there going, "Oh well, we almost got that one done." It drives you crazy a little bit, but then on the other hand, if I were to

just hire a bunch of guys to move the faders up and down, I wouldn't get "the good result." And besides, all these people have very unique personalities. Todd is truly a unique and mysterious character. Same with Dondorf, same with Chrislu. And fortunately they all get along with each other. And it's very amusing to be in the same room with these three guys trying to have a conversation with each other. I really enjoy it.

The Mother Of All Interviews: Part 2

by Don Menn, 1992

Here is the second part of the rather excellent interview conducted by Don Menn in 1992. This is a very substantial piece of reporting and certainly not easily available so I figured it was my duty to bring it into the global domain.
If you ARE Don Menn don't hesitate to mail me with threats to remove this from the web...but I'd rather you didn't :)
DM=Don Menn
MG=Matt Groening

DM: Nicolas Slominsky describes you as the pioneer of the future millennium of music. Do you have a concept of what he means?
No, but he's very kind to make up something like that. When you start using words like millennium, that's pushing the boundaries of good taste.
DM: He explained that the technology you have mastered opens up compositional possibilities, possibilities never available to any composer before.
Well, the sad thing is that the technologies that I've developed are probably not going to be available to any composer afterwards either, because the technologies are all so expensive. Unless something happens to bring down the cost of the tools that I'm using then most of the other people who are writing music will never be able to deal with it.
DM: So you don't think there will be a drop in price as the technology changes?
If there's another whole machine invented that does what the Synclavier does and sells for a reasonable amount of money, yes, but I don't see any chance in the world that the Synclavier's price is going to come down. As a matter of fact, at New England Digital they're trying to phase out their relationship with musicians and design the machine purely as a post-production tool for video and motion pictures for doing sound effects. This thing was originally designed as a digital instrument for the musician, hut that part of their consumer base is the least significant now, so all their research and improvements are going in the direction of making a useful tool for grinding out commercials and soundtracks. [Since this interview New England Digital has gone out of business.]
DM: That makes you one of the only inhabitants of the little island in what happened in music in the '80s and '90s
Probably.
DM: That's kind of sad.
Well, I don't think it's going to be any great loss Nobody knows what I did anyway, so how are they going to miss it?
DM: You have a sense that no one knows what you're doing?
I don't think that anybody has any idea what gets on in my room over there, because very little of it has been released on record - they have no idea.
DM: You've had trouble with distribution, but is it also part of the problem that the refinement~ of your music creates a ~smaller and smaller audience?
I think that the shrinkage of the audience is inevitable, but the distribution problem is not inevitable. That's an unfortunate situation that I can't really do anything about, hut I don't believe the access to distribution or the lack of it is an accidental occurrence.
DM: You say you can't do anything about it. Is it curable by anyone?
Not in the United States.I mean,I think that I still have a potential market worldwide outside

the United States, but as long as we have the current type of political and supposedly moral machinery of the United States, the way it is now, it's not likely that the music has much of a future in this country.

MG: what's gratifying to me is that some of your stuff is available now on CD. I go into very conventional record stores, and I see this huge row of your CDs.

But not in every state. California or the Los Angeles area may be neat in terms of the amount of stuff that's in stores, but there are other places where major chains won't carry it. There was an article in Billboard last year about some chain based in Washington State that has over 100 outlets that didn't want to carry this stuff. One of the things that they were trying to do is say that the lyrics on these albums were too nasty' but one of the things that they didn't want to sell was Jazz from Hell, which is an instrumental record When Billboard questioned the guy about it, he said' "Well, if it's not the lyrics, then it must be the cover." The cover was just a picture of my face.

MG: I saw you perform, I think it was in 1981 at the Santa Monica Civic, and I was startled to see this nice, portly old man come out and perform with you. It was Nicolas Slonimsky. How did you get him to join you onstage?

I'd been asked to be the host of a concert in New York for the celebration of Louise Varese's 90th birthday, and my function in the concert was to be the MC. What they were trying to do was get a younger audience to come and hear the music of Varese, and I thought that to do a good job, maybe I should talk to some people who knew something about Varese's background and get some anecdotes that I could pass along to the audience. It turned out that this was completely unnecessary, because when the concert occurred, the audience was so unruly, it was just like a Palladium Halloween audience. The concert was at the Palladium. They were behaving like a rock and roll audience. They sat completely still when the music was being played, but as soon as the music stopped there was pandemonium, so there was no way to tell them anything. But I did make the attempt to get some information from Slonimsky about Varese, and that's how I met him. At the end of the '81 tour, I think it was the last day, we invited him to come onstage and participate in some improvisation. He was a good sport and went out and did it.

DM: He said it was one of the great experiences of his musical life, partly because the crowd was a rock and roll crowd that lumped up and shouted. He was used to small crowds of polite music-listeners.

I've been to a few of those, too. Every once in a whale they do a little Nicolas Slonimsky birthday celebration here in Los Angeles. Composers contribute little compositions as birthday gifts. I've done two of those. I went to one of these things; it was held at the art gallery in downtown Los Angeles. It was pretty mild. There's no substitute for a rock and roll audience.

DM: He said to me that he wanted some time soon to sit down with you and talk about "the basics." Are there "basics" you'd like to talk to him about?

We've had some little discussions about technique in music. I'm reasonably familiar with his books, and on one occasion, when he came over here, we videotaped him, and I asked him to explain the theory behind the chords in that book of scales that most people are familiar with. It was really quite interesting, because it's based on the simple idea that if you take an octave or groups of octaves, and divide them into proportions other than the way in which normal music is divided, then you wind up with different types of harmony. It never occurred to me that that was the simple logic that was generating all those scales. But that was basically me listening to him talk. Maybe on some occasion we should sit down and talk about the way in which I put my stuff together, but there hasn't been a convenient time to do it.

DM: He described you as being what he would call a classical constructionist, meaning that you use 12 tones and 11 Intervals - as is tradition In Western music - with not a whole lot of reliance on quarter tones or other modalities, and that In the

samples that you do for the Synclavier, you're constructing new sounds with these 12 tones and 11 intervals. Would you agree with this description?
It's true that I haven't written very much music on the Synclavier that involves pitches that are not on the tempered scale, but in live music performances we'll deal with any kind of musical material that happens to be at hand. The closest I can get to quarter-tone music is when I sing.
DM: Is that Intentional?
No, I just don't have any control over it.
DM: Do you have a feeling that you'll ever go into other tunings, or is dissonance just something to be resolved?
Well, I don't always resolve it. Most of the time I just leave it squatting there. I did a lot of early experimentation with quarter-tone stuff and found it not to be that interesting for my ear. To me, the net result of a whole composition based on quarter tones sounds like a badly tuned piano. I've heard recordings of Ives quarter-tone piano music which just sounds like the piano tuner was an amateur. You would imagine, if you were a music student and you were interested in dissonance, that you could be even more dissonant by writing quarter-tone music and stacking clusters of that. But to my ear, it doesn't really work.
DM: When you construct music, are you thinking vertically - thinking of chords?
Any stack of notes you can call a chord -or any stack of sounds, whether they're musical pitches or just textures. I mean, I like chords of percussion instruments where you get a chordal result if you have a bass drum, a castanet, a jingle bell, and a guiro at the same time - if they're all hit at the same time, you will get some sort of a chordal sensation out of it, partly because there is a pitch content to all those instruments. It doesn't hit you in the face like a trumpet, but there is pitch content. You can prove that by taking a sample of the bass drum or any of these instruments and playing up and down the keyboard - you'll hear the pitch move.
DM: But when you're sitting down and thinking, "Today I'm writing music," are you thinking, "This is In the key of C# minor"?
No, I never did that.
DM: How do you resolve things In your music? How do you build and resolve? Is there a plan?
It depends on what kind of piece it is. And there are a number of ways you can enter the data into the Synclavier. One is to play it on the key-board, another is to play it on the Octapad. You can type it in in this obscure language called Script- which I don't know how to do - or you can type it in on the "G Page," which is just a stack of numbers, kind of like a phone book, or you can type it in in music notation, which allows you to see staves on a screen. So there's a lot of different ways to enter it. Depending on how you enter it, that makes a difference in how you develop whatever was there to begin with. Since I have only minimal keyboard technique, any-thing that I play in on the keyboard, I have to do it with the speed knob turned way down. Then do a lot of editing to it after it's been entered in. But all those piano parts on "N-Lite" - you know, those cadenzas and stuff? I played them.
MG: Did you know where you were going with that piece?
No. Because the most boring part of composing is when you finally understand what the object is that you're working on, and you know what the boundaries are, you know where it's beginning and where it's ending, and then you're down to the drudgery of cleaning it up. That's the most tedious part to me, but it's something that has to be done before you put it onto tape or transfer it into music printing so that somebody can play it. The fun part is getting a new batch of samples and figuring out how you can manipulate them. You'll be starting to generate the material. One of the reasons why the stuff takes so long to do is that the preparation work to do a composition is so lengthy and involved that just gathering

up the material to make your piece could take two or three months. Then, on a couple of days, you'll sit there and do some stuff to it and come up with the beginning of the piece, and then it just stays on the hard disk in storage for however long until you get interested in it again.

MG: Do you work on a lot of things at once?

Yeah, right now there's probably about five hundred different titles.

MG: Unfinished

Yeah.

MG: Do you know what they are?

No, once they're in hard-disk storage, when I go back to them, all you're doing is looking at a computer number. You call it up, and you have only the vaguest recollection of what the thing was or how it started out. First of all, when it's stored, it's stored with the software of the age in which it was done, and there could have been two software updates a year so things can be outmoded fairly rapidly. Also, it's stored with the older samples that were available at the time, so the first thing I do with an old piece that I want to listen to again is call it up and look at what sample patches are already on there and check to see whether I have newer, better samples for any of those sounds to replace all those things. I piddle around with it for a while, then re-save it in its somewhat updated edition. I might not even do any work on it - just haul it out, and listen to it, and see where it's going to go. But for the past year, I've been so involved with this Ensemble Modern project that most of the composition work has just been that drudgery part - just cleaning it up, getting ready for this thing.

MG: Do you rank your music In any kind of hierarchy? Do you consider the rock and roll stuff inferior to the classical stuff?

No.

MG: It's all the same?

It's a different aspect of the same thing. I've got an imagination. So I earn a living by producing merchandisable manifestations of portions of my imagination.

MG: So you don't do one type of music In order to pay for another?

No, I would probably do "Baby Take Your Teeth Out" if nobody paid me. I mean, nobody did pay me. That particular song was concocted at a soundcheck at the place where this concert was taking place in Frankfurt. We played at the Alte Opera in 1982, and that song came from that soundcheck.

DM: I'm still stuck on something you brought up about not ranking your compositions. If something like "N-Lite" took ten years to do - - and "Baby Take Your Teeth Out" took 20 minutes, why should they be the same?

DM: It seams to me you've put more Into one than the other, and therefore you might have an opinion of that effort yielding more than the 20-minute one.

Well, the function of both things is to entertain. The one that took ten years is probably way over budget in terms of how much bang for the buck you're going to get. The end of any piece is basically: you're decorating time. "Baby Take Your Teeth Out" is a minute and ten seconds. Okay, so it shouldn't have taken ten years. It should have taken much less, and it did, but if that minute and ten seconds amuses you, okay, fine. And then there are people who will never be able to sit through "N-Lite" - it's 23 minutes long. They would rather have a minute and ten seconds of something that'll make them laugh. The point is that each piece, for what it is supposed to do, achieves a certain level of entertainment success.

DM: If you don't rank your pieces, what differentiation do you make between live work, Synclavier work, and some of the work being done to fund this so called "more serious"music?

Well, if I had never done any rock and roll, I wouldn't have a Synclavier. It's as simple as that. I mean, learn my living by making rock and roll records. But I didn't set out to do rock and roll just so I could spend my sunset years frying my room with a high radiation source.

MG: Did you anticipate the development of this technology?
Not to the point that I see it being available now. All along, from the point that I could afford to buy new audio tools, I would seek out those designers - and there are plenty of guys in Los Angeles who'll build you any kind of a box you'd care to describe, so long as you can afford to do it, and in the '70s I used to do certain experimentation with electronic devices for making music, but it's always better to have something off the shelf with a company behind it that will repair it when it explodes.
MG: In other Interviews, you've said you were exasperated by your music not being played correctly.
Well, yeah.
MG: And it seems that this technology is the answer to Frank Zappa's problem. Here it is exactly the way you want it to be performed.
Well, even with the most perfect Synclavier performance, you still don't get 100%, because there are certain nuances that are going to be absent just because the music is being played by samples, which means every note will always be the same sound.
MG: You can't alter that?
You can put vibrato on it and change its amplitude and change its duration, but basically it is a digital recording of some event. What you lose is - for example, you have a patch of clarinet notes, and every clarinet note is perfect, and they're lovely clarinet notes, and then you tell the Synclavier to play this ungodly fast clarinet riff that no human being could play. That's nice. You could never get it another way. But on the other hind, if you have a really fine clarinet player, every one of the notes that he played would be different, and your ear detects that variety. I think that the ear prefers variety, unless you happen to be one of those Mongoloids who thinks that the drum machine is the greatest device known to mankind. I can't stand to listen to them. Even in the case of kick drums and snare drums, you hear exactly the same pulse at 100% amplitude each time.
MG: So contemporary pop music doesn't do much for you.
Yeah, that's true. On the Synclavier, when we do repeated patterns with percussion samples, what we want to try and do is have multiple samples of the snare drum and the kick drum, so that every time the pulse comes along, it's actually a different recording and gives it more texture and variety.
DM: When you were talking about the Synclavier being an endangered species, what does that mean for the future of music? Will composers revert back to guitars and live groups and small synthesizers? I don't think there are going to be that many composers in the future. I think that in today's world, if a person decides to be a composer, that person should probably seek medical help, because there's no way for you to earn a living. You can't. You have to have another job. You can't just write music.
DM: That's sort of sad.
I don't think it was ever really that much better, but things are getting especially tough now because there are no budgets for the performances, no budgets for rehearsal. If a chamber group or an orchestra does a performance of some-thing, it's probably something that's already been written for a hundred years, and the orchestra already knows it, which means that they don't have to spend money for rehearsal. They play only the hits. And some guy who decides he wants to write music in the United States, what does he do? He may be able to write it down, but he's never going to get it played. And it takes so long to do it, and the mechanics of preparing just the paperwork to hind it to an orchestra are quite expensive, so its an exercise in futility.
MG: But that's what you do.
Well, I don't think there's even an ~riunity to do that anymore. If I were to go out and try to get a record contract today, as a new artist, I couldn't get one.

MG: It seems that the culture is so fragmented that people who would be Interested In composing serious orchestral music don't know anything about pop music. You're one of the few people that has jumped from category to category. Who else has orchestral music in the rock bin at Tower?

Yeah, but basically that's neither here nor there. Just because I managed to get away with it doesn't have any real impact on what the real problem is. If you expect to have a future history of music, somebody's got to write it, and they can't write it unless they can survive while they're writing it. That's what's being endangered. I mean, spotted owls are nice, but nobody gives a fuck about composers. They have no meaning they have no lobby, they have no power to control the payment of royalties due them for performances of their material. Those industrial entities that consume the compositions - like the commercial business, the movie business - all have contracts which are basically designed to deprive the composer of all of his rights. For example, if you do a film score, it is not likely you'll be able to maintain your own publishing royalties. The motion picture companies are going to take all that away. So what do you do?

DM: In Germany they're funding these performances with lots of money, and you've mentioned other regional groups or territories coming up with similar festivals. Why does it work there and not here? Or will it start failing

It's difficult there, because the German economy has the major burden of bringing the East into the 20th Century, and that's eating up a lot of the cash that might be spent on culture, but they still maintain cultural events. The thing is, in the United States there is an anti-cultural bias. You can't even use that word. There are two words you don't use in connection with the U.S. government: You don't use the "C" word, which is "culture," and you don't use the "I" word, which is "intellectual." When [Czech president playwright Vaclav Havel gave a speech to the congress, be did something really unbelievable. He got the entire Congress to cheer for intellectuals by using this spurious jujitsu method, claiming the Founding Fathers were intellectuals, thereby forcing the American legislators to go "Yeah!" for intellectuals. But that word has never been used effectively in conjunction with any form of U.S. government before. Just as it's very easy for candidates to say things like,"We will solve the deficit by slashing waste, fraud, and abuse," it's also easy to take aim at the National Endowment for the Arts or any other kind of cultural funding and give the public the impression that the world would be a better place if you never spent any more money keeping artists alive because who needs that? It's interesting that that kind of logic is so successful to the American electorate. They are willing to buy into this theory that any support for artistic activity is somehow unhealthy, when in fact if you look at the economic numbers there are ways to show that investment in things of an artistic nature creates jobs for other people that had nothing to do with art. The best example would be if you have a decaying inner-city area like SoHo in New York. Before the artists moved into SoHo, it was just warehouses - it was a run down area. So a few artists moved in, and they did some painting and then they opened a gallery, then they opened a coffee shop, and the next thing you know the whole thing was gentrified and you've got apartments in the area that are going for $3,000 to $5,000 a month. That same type of scenario has repeated itself in other cities in the United States, but nobody ever looks at that. The result of just a few dollars spent to make life easier for artists eventually turns out to make profits for people who are not connected with art. These arguments against the National Endowment for the Arts really piss me off. On the one hand, I hate the idea that government should be involved in any way with the arts, because it means that somebody with a government title who knows nothing about art has to pass out money. But on the other hand, the bulk of the cash of the NEA yearly budget - which is a mere 175 million dollars, a pittance compared to other government projects - the bulk of it does not go for financing things like the Mapplethorpe exhibition. Mapplethorpe [a photographer whose exhibition included male nudes] got $45,000. The bulk of the money goes to support regional ballet companies,

regional orchestras, or things where there's some community involvement. That's the reason why it was set up, and that's the way the bulk of the money is spent. And if you throw that away, then what have you got? Do you really want to see a country like the United States converted into nothing more than a nation of drones, getting up, going to their miserable little jobs, producing odd products that nobody wants to buy and then coming home and watching television? Is that-I mean, there has to be more to life than just going to work and then wallowing in the garbage that you created while you were at work.

MG: There also seems to be sort of a back-lash against the arts because of a correct perception that most people who are involved in creative self expression have contempt for that, or at least they're opposed to the more conservative ideas. And people can't accept that.

I think the whole idea of a conservative bent in the United States is a media fiction. There are two important media fictions that you have to see through in order to comprehend life in the United States. One of them is the constant drone of these guys, who are basically fight-wing operatives, who go on television and complain about the liberal media bias. This simply doesn't exist, because all the media are owned by right-wing guys. There's no liberal media bias there. That's a straw man that has been constructed. when they constructed it, the idea was that, "Oh! If there's a liberal media bias, we must balance it by having more fight-wing content in our programming"' thereby giving them the license to saturate and spin-doctor all the news that comes to you. I don't think that the sentiment of the population really is the way that television would convince you things are. The whole goal - especially in news broadcasting - is to convince anybody watching that all things connected with the Republican Party are good and all things not connected with the Republican Party are bad. That's the subtext of all of this. No matter what it is, if it's not of the Republican species, then it is bad.

DM: How do things like The Simpsons slip onto television?

Well, that's a good question.

MG: I'm mystified myself I don't know

I just hope they don't cut you.

MG: I think that - as you know - you make people laugh, and sometimes you fool them.

Yeah, but you didn't fool the nuclear industry or the lumber guys.

MG: No, the fact that a little radioactive rod falls in the back of Homer's neck in every episode, they caught on to that one. No, you can say anything on television as long as you say it once, but if you start repeating it, then they start catching on. That's why-you can't imagine the kind of stuff we get taken apart for on The Simpsons. It's everything. Promoting homosexuality, and disrespect -

DM: Is humor the preferable way to tell the truth, or a safe way?

It beats the hell out of turning to somebody and saying, "Boy, you've got bad breath." Or whatever horrible truth you have to do. I mean, why make life even more difficult for the person who has the problem?

MG: So how do you oppose these guys?

You want to know what they hate more than anything else in life? They can't stand for people not to take them seriously. If you laugh at them for an instant, it's just like - the devil walks in the room, right? And he goes, "I'm the Devil," and you take a fork and poke him in the belly, and the gas comes out, and he'll go twirling around the room like an unleashed balloon. That's the way these guys are. You can't laugh at them. They hate it, because they're so full of shit, they're so full of themselves that they just can't believe that people don't appreciate them for the grand, highly evolved creatures that they imagine themselves to be. They hate to be laughed at. If they weren't so fucking dangerous, it would be fun to laugh at them all the time, but sometimes you have to take into account how much damage they can do.

DM: when you were at the Senate in '85, were you serious or funny?
I thought I was funny.
DM: Did they?
Well, the audience did. They kept telling the audience to shut up. The atmosphere there was really very strange, because the hearing itself was such a mongrelization. It took place in the Science, Commerce, and Transportation Committee - the least likely place in all of the U.S. government you'd thank that the matter of rock lyrics should be brought up. The reason it was there was that five of the members of the committee had wives who had signed the original PMRC letter, and they were using it as a photo op, and it was wildly attended. There were 50 still photographers and something like 30 video teams. It was a big media event. And one of the senators said, "I've been on committees dealing with the MX, the budget, this thing that thing and I have never seen anything like this in my life." It was the hot ticket of 1985.
DM: what do you mean, he'd never seen anything like it?
The media zoo that sprang up around the issue. One of the stars of the hearing was Paula Hawking the Nancy Reagan lookalike from Florida - she had the reputation of being the least effective senator; she was really a disaster. Another one of her outstanding features was that all the Watergate burglars had found employment in her office in Florida. She was just this miserable thing. She wasn't a member of the committee, but she was having trouble getting re-elected, so Danforth, who was the chairman of the committee, did her a favor - one Republican to another - and allowed her to participate in the media circus, make some comments, and, you know, to grill me. She was the one who wanted to know what kind of toys my children had.
DM: How come you quit going directly before political groups? Was it because the bad guys were getting too much publicity out of it? Or are you lust tired of the chore?
No, no - it's not being tired. I mean, I'll still make comments about it, but to go on these debate shows, to be commoditized as yet another talking head anytime somebody wants.... The topic of censorship comes up, my phone starts ringing you know? Some rap group gets its record banned someplace and my phone rings. And they think that the next day, they're going to have their special sound bite where I'll go on and debate with Tipper Core. I mean that's the mentality the level of the debate. And I just refuse to do that.
DM: So it's a stupid use of your time?
Well, it's for a worthy cause, but I think you could be more effective just talking generally about the idea of why this type of censorship is occurring and who's behind it than to do the talk show circuit every time one of these things hits the news wheel, and go on and you be a character who is against censorship and you will be debating somebody from some Christian organization. It's just hokey.
DM: why is it that some of the rap groups are getting a better deal than you are? what has changed? You were a bad guy back in the '60s and '70s, and your records are now banned for distribution in certain states or places, yet most of these groups are going out there to the record bins. How come you're so honored?
I don't think any of those records pose much of a political threat to the people who'd like to see it stopped.
DM: what's your political threat?
I can talk. And there's always the possibility that someone will ask me a question, and I'll tell them what I think. They don't want to have anybody make fun of them. Besides, the situation with the lyrics of most of the rap records is, you've got basically two topics. You have sex and racism.
DM: Do you think there's more racism in music now?
Yeah. But it's a reflection of the times. I think there's more racism in government.

MG: Can we talk about some of your pre Mothers Of Invention composing? I'm remembering one of the mystery disks from the early '60s, something you had done at Mount St. Mary's College. what was that?
Mount St. Mary's was the first time I had a concert of my music. As with most of the other concerts of my music, I had to pay for it.
MG: what year was that?
That was 1962. That was a bargain, though, because it was only $300. It was a student orchestra. There were probably about fifty people in the audience, and - for some strange reason - KPFK taped it, and I got a copy.
MG: what were the compositions?
There was one thing called "Opus 5," and there were aleatoric compositions that involved a certain amount of improvisation, and there were some written sections that you actually had to play. Some of the things were graphic, and there was a tape of some electronic music that was being played in the background with orchestra, and I had some 8mm films that were being projected.
MG: This obviously didn't pay the rent. How did you pay the rent at the time?
My only source of income was working this barbecue joint up in Sun Village. I'd work there on weekends.
MG: Really?
Yeah. in the band, I wasn't making barbecue.
MG: what was the band?
It was just a pickup band. Some guys that I knew from high school who lived up there. I would come up, plug in my guitar, play with them.
MG: You didn't record any of that stuff?
Yes, we did. Some of that's on the mystery disk, too. There was no rehearsal. You'd just go up there and play bar band music, and if somebody was in the audience, and they wanted to sing' like a take of "Cora" - they were singing "Steal Away" -
MG: Did anybody ever ask for "Caravan, with the drum solo?
That actually happened when we worked at a gig in El Monte. Some drunken buffoon in the audience requested it. [Slurs like a drunk:["I wanna hear 'Caravan' with a drum sola!" There are certain things you remember from your career, like that line. when we worked at this music fair out in Long Island, we were the opening act for the Vanilla Fudge. 1968,I think it was. I remember this one guy out in the audience - it was the Weatbury Music Fair- and the quote was [loud and belligerent] "Youse guys stink! Bring on the Fudge!"
MG: You were Captain Beefheart's road manager for a short time.
Yeah.
MG: And you went to Europe?
I was supposed to be MC for the first big rock festival in France, at a time when the French government was very right-wing, and they didn't want to have large-scale rock and roll in the country. And so at the last minute, this festival was moved from France to Belgium, right across the border, into a turnip field. They constructed a tent, which was held up by these enormous girders. They had 15,000 people in a big circus tent. This was in November, I think. The weather was really not very nice. It's cold, and it's damp, and it was in the middle of a turnip field. I mean mondo turnips. And all the acts, and all the people who wished to see these acts, were urged to find this location in the turnip field, and show up for this festival. And they'd hired me to be the MC and also to bring over Captain Beefheart. It was has first appearance over there. And it was a night-mare, because nobody could speak English, and I couldn't speak French, or anything else for that matter. So my function was really rather limited. I felt a little bit like Linda McCartney. I'd stand there and go wave, wave, wave. I sat in with a few of the groups during the three days of the festival. But it was so miserable because all these European hippies had brought their sleeping bags, and they had the bags laid out on the ground in this tent, and they basically

froze and slept through the entire festival, which went on 24 hours a day, around the clock. One of the highlights of the event was the Art Ensemble Of Chicago, which went on at 5:00 A.M. to an audience of slumbering Euro-hippies.

DM: In turnips...

And to alert them to the fact that they were performing, one of the guys lit a flare and threw it fight out into the middle of the audience, which made some of them jump up and dance around wildly and try and put the fire out.

MG: Tell about the hot dogs.

Oh, yeah. Because it was located in a turnip area, and far away from anything that you would call necessary supports for civilization, the menu was limited. The people who were attending this festival, including all the talent, had access to these foodstuffs: Belgian waffles in plastic - these puffy little waffles in plastic, you could have that - or you could have a hot dog. Now the hot dogs were kept in this tank. when I was a kid, they used to have these big tanks for Nehi beverages, you know, a rectangular tank full of water, and there would be drink bottles in it. Well, in this case, there was a tank full of these Belgian weenies. Now, some of them would float to the surface, and the tips that would stick out were green, and we don't know what color the material under the water was, but it was a tank of green weenies poking out, and you could either eat that or the Belgian waffles. And you couldn't send out for a pizza. You were in the middle of nowhere.

MG: Did you ever play with Beefheart's Magic Band?

Yeah.

DM: What year was that?

'69 or '70.

MG: How did you meet them?

I went to high school with him [Don Van Vliet/Captain Beefheart].

MG: Did you go to class together?

No, not exactly. At the time that I knew him, has father had had a heart attack. His father drove a bread truck, and so Don had dropped out of school to take over the father's bread truck route, which was between Lancaster and Mojave. So I used to go over to his house, and we had all the used pineapple buns that we could ever wish for out of the truck. We'd sit around and listen to rhythm and blues records and eat what was left over from the bread truck route.

MG: Did you have any idea what your futures held?

Did we know we were going into show business? No.

MG: Did you scheme, did you plan did you fantasize?

At that time, not. I don't have any recollection of sitting around with Don and going~ "Yeah, now we'll. . . ." No, we were just listening to R&B records and eating pineapple buns.

DM: You both have a graphics background. Were you artists then, or being musicians, or both?

He had been doing painting and sculpting for a long time. My graphics background was I'd had some art classes in school. I didn't really want to go into that. I did earn my living as a commercial artist for a little while during that period, but -

MG: what kind of stuff did you do?

I did greeting cards, I wrote advertising copy for the First National Bank in Ontario, California, and I did some little illustrations.

DM: Anything that was often out there?

Some of the greeting cards were often out there. I convinced the guy that I was working for - this place in Claremont, California, called the Nile Running Greeting Card studio, that specialized in silk-screen, that cards of a floral nature would likely be considered entertaining by elderly Midwestern women.

MG: Very focused on the graphics!

Yeah, it was niche marketing. You knew what they liked, and you serviced the need. And I

was in the silk-screen department with the big rubber gloves, you know, going [makes squeaky, tugging noise] and pulling the Mylar off of these smelly things. And so I talked him into letting me do my own line of greeting cards on an experimental basis, designed some of these cards, and designed a little rack to dispose of them.

DM: Do you have them anymore?

There's some around, yeah. They're truly awful.

DM: Give us the wording and the image.

Well, one of them was - it was painted on chrome-coat stock' you know, a nice glossy stock. The front of the card says, "Captured Russian Photo Shows Evidence of American Presence on Moon First." And you open it up, and there's a picture of a lunar crater with "Jesus Saves" inscribed on it.

DM: You were a bad boy as a baby, huh? What else?

Let's see, there was another one that just said, "Goodbye" on the front, and inside: a black hand. And - this is fairly abstract - one where the front of the card said, "Farky." You open it up, and there's a picture of a pirate. Think about it for a while. You have to look at this guy and imagine him saying that word, and then you derive the meaning that was intended.

DM: You've always been good at naming things. All these words, you have a great sense of-

I think it's because of this old book that I found.

DM: which was?

I don't even remember the name of it. It's probably around here someplace. It's an old, decrepit, leather-backed book about the ancient Egyptian religion. One of the little-known facts about this religion is: When you're on your way to heaven, you can't go anywhere unless you know the name of everything. So the Egyptian rulers, in their preparation for going to heaven, spent a lot of time memorizing the name of the doorsill, the name of the door frame, the name of the paving stones, the name of everything. Be-cause nothing would let you by' unless you could name it.

DM: You were worried.

Big time!

MG: How could anybody not albums with names like Lumpy Gravy, Uncle Meat, Hot Rats, or Burnt Weeny Sandwich?

I don't know. A lot of people did resist it

MG: How did you get on The Steve Allen Show in '62?

Just called them up, and said I play the bicycle and you know, they were booking all kinds of goofy things on there. The tape was given to me as a birthday gift a few years ago. Someone found a copy of it and sent it over.

MG: what was it like?

Well, first of all, I'm clean-shaven, and I'm wearing a suit and a tie, and my speech patterns resemble the way Dweezil talks now, which I thought was very odd.

MG: So, when did you grow your mustache and- whatever you called this [indicating hair beneath Frank's lip?

Actually,I grew it when I was in high school, but I shaved it off after I got out of high school. I had a little skinny mustache and a "Genghis" down here.

MG: You could get away with that?

What were they going to do, throw me out of school? They did.

DM: Did you get thrown out, really?

Yeah. I got in some trouble, and they told me that I could either write a 2,000-word essay or be suspended for two weeks, so I took a two week vacation, and I showed up back in school with a list of all my R&B records by artist and label, and a list of all the ones that I thought I was going to buy for the next three or four months, and that was my 2,000-word essay. I laughed at them.

DM: what did they say?
What could they say? They didn't like me, and I knew they didn't like me, and I didn't like them. And I graduated with 12 or 20 units less than what you needed to graduate with, but they couldn't thank of keeping me there for another year. It was unthinkable.
MG: You were in a band at that time, too, right? So you were just a degenerate.
Absolutely. The scum of the earth, as far as the people in Lancaster were concerned. See, I didn't know when I moved to Lancaster that, prior to my arrival, there had been an unfortunate experience with "Negroes" in the area. A group of black entertainers had come up from what they call "down below," the evil area below the high desert. They had come up. It was Big Jay McNeeley and a bunch of other entertainers that had come to do a rock show at the fairgrounds, and along with them came people who were selling reefers and pills, and the founding fathers of the city decided never again shall this music enter our fair cowboy area. I didn't know any of this had happened. I moved there from San Diego, and put a rhythm and blues band together, and decided to throw my own dance, and put up little posters just like in the 1950 movies with the help of this lady who ran the local record store. Her name was Elsie. We rented the women's club, and we were going to have our little dance there. And the day before the dance, walking down Lancaster Boulevard at 6:00 o'clock in the evening, I was arrested for vagrancy. They kept me in jail overnight, trying to make sure this dance wasn't going to come off.
DM: How old were you?
Seventeen.
MG: So what happened?
I got out, and we had the dance.
MG: And civilization didn't fall.
It didn't fall. And furthermore, the dance -see, all of the black people in the area lived out in Sun Village, like 20 or 30 miles away from the school They were in their own little turkey-infested ghetto, and they came to this dance, because I had a mixed band. There was a couple of blacks, a couple of Mexicans. You know, there weren't that many white-bread people who could play anything that resembled rock and roll in the area, so we just had this hodgepodge band. The whole attitude of that area up there was very strange. After the dance there was what could have turned into a really unfortunate confrontation with the lettermen from the school, the varsity white-bread boys, who wanted to beat me and the band up after the show as we were loading our equipment. It was so unbelievably hokey. The Sun Village residents came to our rescue. When they saw what was happening, trunks started opening up and chains started coming out and things like that, and the lettermen walked away.
MG: So, you weren't popular in school?
No.
MG: Were you distinctly unpopular?
Yes.
MG: With the kids?
With everybody. What I wore to school was -you know those - they're wearing them now, those blue-hooded parkas. I would go to school with a blue-hooded parka up, with sunglasses on, my mustache, my little goatee, and I'd take my guitar to school.
MG: Did you play in the school orchestra?
Yeah, drums.
DM: Education is losing all funding for music programs. Is this another black hole in the future?
Well, it seems to me that the subtext for stamping out the arts.... In the realm of arts, you always have the possibility for creative thinking, which means deviation from the norm, the prescribed political norm that everybody is trying to cram down your throat. If they can stop creative thinking, then they've got a better chance of maintaining the stranglehold of

stupidity on the entire population. And creative thinking can, and often does, start at an early age. So if they can nip it in the bud, while the little beggars are in school, then it's good for them. I thank they would like to replace every single art program with some sort of sport or ROTC thing just to keep people from thinking.

MG: what made you switch from drums to guitar?

I just liked the way the guitar sounded, and I lacked the proper hand-to-foot coordination to play a drum set. When I was in high school orchestras, all you had to do was be able to roll and go boom and ding and stuff like that, but it's a different story to play syncopation. I was never really good enough to be a drummer in a band, and the first rock-and-roll gig that I had - it's been stated before that on my way to the gig as a drummer, I had forgotten my drumsticks, and had to drive back to the other side of town to get them.

MG: So you were listening to Varese at the time and other classical weirdos. Was there any-body else who was digging that besides you?

When I was a senior, my brother Bobby was a freshman. And I didn't have any friends, but he had three or four, and they used to come over to the house, and I would make them listen to these records.

DM: You talked about one time being in New York and walking by Varese's place on Sullivan Street and thinking of him being in that room or house or apartment for 25 years, unable to compose music.

He stopped. He stopped writing for 25 years.

DM: Why?

Because nobody would play it.

DM: what happened to him in the last 25 years of his life?

Well, in the last few years of his life, he was "rehabilitated." Columbia decided to do some recordings of his music -

DM: Slominsky's recordings?

No. Slonimsky's was the first recording of "lonisations." The second recording of the Varese stuff, as far as l know, was that EMS 401 disc that dates from 1950.

MG: Was that the famous one you bought?

Yeah. In the late '60s, Columbia decided to do some recordings of his music. They did two or three albums with' I think, Robert Craft, the guy who recorded most of the Stravinsky stuff, and there were some concerts in New York City at Town Hall, and so he got a little bit of recognition. **[The talk turns to other "bad boy" composers, including George Antheil and his "Ballet Mecanique"]**

There's another album by him, on a Dutch label. I have it. There are a group of pieces for piano and violin. It has "Ballet Mecanique" on one side, and it has these obscure pieces - the thing that's odd about these pieces is the rhythm. I put the needle in the groove and started listening, and I went, "Son-of-a-bitch. I could have written that." It really sounded like "The Black Page." There were a couple of people who were vying for the title of "Bad Boy of Music" during that period. The other guy was Leo Ornstein, who was a composer who wrote piano music, some of which was to be played with a two-by-four. One of his pieces was called "Wild Men's Dance." You couldn't play the chords with your fingers, you needed a 2-by-4. You can imagine a guy in a tuxedo in Carnegie Hall going DUN DUN DUN DUN DUN - "This is 'Wild Men's Dance'! I'm the Bad Boy of Music! DUN DUN!"

DM: What is Conlon Nancarrow doing these days?

I think he had a heart attack recently. He still lives in Mexico City. He's another example of a guy who couldn't earn a living in the United States. He was being ignored, so he moved to Mexico, and punched his [player Piano] rolls down there. It was cheaper for him to live in Mexico City.

DM: He comes from a little town in Arkansas. He must have had an unhappy youth.

Yeah. Bad boy in Arkansas. Well, how about Harry Partch?

MG: His music is still being played.
All his instruments went to this foundation which is located in Escondido, and they maintain all this stuff and give performances of his music.
MG: what do you think of Harry Partch?
I like the sound of the instruments, and I like parts of the compositions, but I think that the stuff goes on and on and on and on and on too long. There's too many repetitions. But the idea of it appeals to me a lot. But it's so personalized. He went all the way. He built his own instruments, developed his own tuning system, developed his own compositional machinery, and just went out there and did it, and he was a pretty good hobo at the same time. That's essentially an American composer kind of a thing to do.
DM: Did you run into lots of interesting composers in Eastern Europe?
I've run into a lot of composers. How interesting they are is hard for me to tell, because, you know, when you run into them, you don't always get to hear what they write. But a few of them gave me cassettes of their music. I didn't find them interesting. Some of it just sounded like graduation from-the Conservatory exercises, and things like that. I heard one guy in Moscow who had made a tape. We went to a gallery, Mars, and there was some electronic music playing in the background I thought it was really very good. It sounded like the work of a guy who should have been writing for orchestra but because he wasn't an official Soviet composer had no access to an orchestra, so he was doing all of his stuff with MIDI gear. And it was good. I think there are plenty of people around the world who have the imagination to create new compositions. One thing that you have to remember: musicians play music. They don't write it. Composers write music. So if you don't have something for a musician to do, you will be treated to noodling. You will have "The World 0' Scales," "The World o' Licks," but you won't have compositions. It's a special knack to invent structures, to invent new harmony, and to invent reasons for doing things. I mean, it's a different skill than being a musician.
MG: Do you think that there's a progression- that music should make progress? That you should do things that haven't been done before?
I think that all music should be personalized. If you decide that you want to be the bad boy of music and play with a two-by-four, then that's your message. Go do it, and the audience that wants to buy records of piano played by two-by-four should have it. But I think that if you're going to do music, it should be something relevant to the person who writes the music. It has more to do with the composer than to do with the style of the times or the school that might have generated the composer. Only in that way is the product valuable: if there's an artifact of an imagination, rather than an artifact of a movement.
MG: what do you think about the traditional composers? Do you care for the old guys?
Well, name me an old guy.
MG: Beethoven? I have an appreciation for the skill of putting it together, but the sound of it is not something that I enjoy, so.... I)M: Brahms? Bach?
Bach is more interesting.
DM: why?
I just like the way it sounds. The same reason I like Varese. I like the way it sounds. But I wouldn't go out of my way to attend a Bach concert or buy an album of that kind of music. To me, of that period, that is the most tolerable of the material to listen to. I don't start getting interested in so-called classical music until the early 20th Century.
MG: Mahler?
No.1 actually like Wagner. I think Wagner was interesting. It's too long, but it's interesting. I have very few Wagner albums, but the things that I've heard, if you look at the time at which it was written, and what he's doing with the material, it's challenging. That's the thing that depresses me about most of the music of that period. It's just not challenging, because it was written to spec. There was a king or a duke or a church or somebody who

said, "Hey. You need to write something. We have a festival coming up, and it must be something I will like." So everything was written to suit the taste buds of some joker with a towel on his head.

DM: So the theory that the church or the nobility helped make the Renaissance happen, or the classical period, is not true in your mind?

I think it probably held back some of the greatest composers, because you had no choice. If you wanted to write, you had to write at the behest of somebody who had more money than you. It's like dealit~ with radio-station programmers and the guy who puts your video on MTV It has to be exactly this, or it goes nowhere. So, here's a guy with 11 kids to feed, what's he going to do? Give the Prince what he wants: sings " Hallelujah Chorus":] "Hallelujah. Hallelujah." [Imitates a prince:] "Oh, yeah, I like that. I can understand that."

DM: So you're not a fan of Handel either?

No.

DM: Schoenberg?

I've only heard four or five pieces by Schoenberg that I can enjoy listening to. There's the Septet, and then there's the suite of pieces for orchestra, the one that has "Summer Morning by the Lake" as one of the movements. I think that's really nice. And Begleitungsmusik: is a parody of motion picture music. I like that. But there's very little else by Schoenberg that I appreciate. And Berg - I like the "Lyric Suite," I like the - there's a piano solo piece, I think it's called Piano Sonata - it's an early piece. I like that. But, I tried to listen to Lulu. I couldn't do it. I had the album of Wozzeck. I could not get through it. I like Messiaen. Took me a while, but I like that music. He's colorful. But I must admit that the first Messiaen album that I ever got was an Angel recording of Chronochromie, and it baffled the snot out of me.? didn't know what to do with it. I could stay interested for about the first three minutes. I was going,, "Whoa, a lot of percussion; that's interesting, but what is this?" It took me years before I could listen to that whole side of the album straight through.

DM: what finally clicked? Just repetition?

No. It's just that the more I learned, the more interesting it became, because at the time that I was first exposed to this kind of music, I didn't have a musical education. I was just a guy buying records. Everything that I liked was based on my gut reaction to what was on the record. For some reason I liked Varese right away. I liked Stravinsky right away, but these other things not. I didn't like Charlie Parker.I didn't like some other modern jazz things. Listening to these things, I would go, "Why do people like this? I don't understand it."

DM: what became different in the way you listened? what do you star' hearing?

Well, when you start learning about structure, when you start learning about how things work, then you can appreciate how other people deal with the material. look, if you're writing diatonic music, you've got 12 note names over seven or eight octaves. That's a pretty limited universe. What can you do to take these components, shake them up, reassemble them, and make something that you would call a composition? That's a pretty interesting challenge. I think that other art forms have a much more open - not an open format, but more material to work with. If you're a poet, let's say there are 300,000 or 400,000 words in the English language. There's your universe. But the possibilities are a little bit more restricted in terms of the structure when you're dealing with diatonics. So the more I learned about what the rules of the game were, the more I could appreciate how other people might solve this problem. How do you maintain somebody's interest over any period of time with what you've concocted? Today I have such a limited amount of recreational listening time that if I decide that I'm going to listen to something - I have a very big collection of records and CDs - I'll pull something out, and I'll put it on so I can really focus on it and go, "Boy, that's interesting."

DM: when you're listening to music, then, are you responding intellectually more than emotionally? Are you getting swept away by some great cadence or is it an idea that's hitting you?
You just have an appreciation for what it is. I mean, I don't think about the composer.I don't sit there and go, "Boy, what a great guy. He dreamed that up." You know, because all I hear is the music.? hear the material performing its little function before my very ears. I listen to the piece.I don't know anything about the lives of these guys. They may have all been absolute bastards. I probably don't want to know what kind of a guy Webern was, but? like the music. And the same for the other pieces that I enjoy listening to. I'm not thinking about who wrote it, or why he wrote it. I'm only listening to the results.
DM: Do you ever listen with interest to the scoring for TV Shows or movies?
Oh, that's so transparent. There's hardly any challenge to that. The thing that always amazes me the most about scoring for films is where they don't use music. That's what's important. To me, films that are heavily laden with score material are almost like sitcoms with too much laugh track. When there's too much [sings beginning of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony] DAH-DAHDAH DAH. When the cellos come in, you know, the guy's saying' "Dramatic now. Appreciate this dramatic moment. Alert! Alert! Drama coming up. Major 7th chord - they're in love! Look out, here comes the love!" It's offensive to me.I find the films where you can really.... If the sound effects are well recorded, and the natural sound of what's going on is interspersed with just a little bit of music, to me it works a lot better.
DM: what about some of the experimenters, like John Cage doing silence [a piece called 4'33" in which the performer makes no intentional sounds]?
I think that's an acquired taste. When I first learned of Cage's work, it seemed like the concept of it was far more entertaining than the audio result, but that could have just been a matter of the performances that were available on record at that time. Because even if you're going to be performing - well, silence is a bad example, but somebody with more abstract notations that require a conscious participation of willingness on the part of musicians to do something constructive in the piece. It's not often that you find musicians who like that idea and who will do a good job with it. I'm pretty sure that early recordings of Cage did not have willing accomplices.
DM: You can have a lot of notes on paper but if it's not well performed, it's not good to listen to.
It's not that there's a lot of notes on the page. A lot of it is really empty. See, contemporary music seems to go through this period where everybody discovered Webern and said, "Write ventilated music." So, a lot of people were writing highly ventilated constructions, but nobody did as well as Webern with the exception, I think, of this tape of Boulez I heard.I really like that, which is all fairly ventilated, but there was this post-Webernian school that sprang up, and it just turned into "hoop, beep" music. And the hoop beep was eventually replaced by minimalism, which is pentatonic and repetitive. It was like, give 'em a hook, and keep it coming and so that's what you got.
DM: what do you got with new age music?
Well, that's like listening to, I think of it as kind of an audio ointment with jingle bells attached.
MG: But it makes the Pringles taste a little better.
Not if you're at the dentist's office, which is the environment in which it seems to thrive. But that's just my own personal thing.
MG: The musical trend that drives me the craziest is when you call a company and are put on hold, and you're forced to listen to whatever it is
. It's awful. That's like people telling you to have a nice day.
MG: Let's talk a little bit about your reactions in non-Western music, like Indian music.
I've always loved Indian music. There was even a period of my life when I thought, "I must

go to India to hear this music." Then I heard how many needles they had to give you, and what kind of diseases were lurking for you over there. I decided, "Well, I'll just get the records instead." I like Indian music, and I like Bulgarian music a lot.

DM: what about music from Africa? Do you ever listen to the tribal stuff?

Yeah. I've heard it, hut I'm... a lot of people are fascinated by the rhythm, hut the rhythm of it is not so exciting to me. I'm not as interested in African music as lam in Bulgarian or Sardinian or Indian music. I think a lot of people listen to African music and want to consume it in the same way that they would consume a U.S. drum machine record. That fancy constant rhythm. And my taste in rhythm goes in other directions.

MG: Didn't you attend a concert of the Bulgarian women when they came here? Did you meet them?

It was a fairly frightening experience. They take a few musicians along with them. There's a guy who plays some kind of a drum-like thing or guitar-like thing but it looked to me like these guys were Bulgarian KGB, like they were watchdogs for the group. They had the special look, the black leather coat. And they were hanging out backstage, and when it was done, after the concert, the girls were in the dressing room. They were kind of lined up in a formal reception thing and we got to come in and say hello, and then we were ushered out. You couldn't really have any communication with them.

MG: what about Asian music? Indonesian?

You mean gamelan music?

MG: Gamelan, Balinese, or Javanese?

That wears on me. The timbre of it is nice, but it goes on and on like a Harry Partch piece. They can play that same pentatonic thing for centuries on end. That's as close as you're going to get to minimalist music.

DM: We?, what about noh music? Japanese?

I like that. That to me is like - it's science-fiction Webern music. You know, people doing erratic grunts followed by one drumbeat and all this oddly balanced stuff. It's like points of sound in time oddly balanced, and I have no idea what it's about or what will be going on onstage, but the sound of it is something I find interesting.

MG: what about reggae?

I don't have a collection of reggae music.I like to play it more than I like to listen to it. Reggae is a ventilated rhythm. If you're going to play a solo with a lot of notes in it and your rhythm accompaniment has a lot of notes in it, then it neutralizes it.? find it more intriguing to play to a reggae background with jagged pulses and big holes in it - there's blank space, whereas the least comfortable thing for me to play to would he something like a fast James Brown band. I wouldn't know what the fuck to do with that.

MG: what do you think of Don's [Van Vliet's] music?

The best of it is unbelievable, and the worst of it is under the influence of some really bad A&R people at Warner Brothers. But there are things on Trout Mask Replica that are unbelievable, and on Clear Spot also.

MG: Is there more from the Trout Mask period?

There are some other things. Yes.

MG: Do you think those will ever come out?

I don't know. There were things in the original sessions that he didn't want to have used. The original plan for the album was to do it like an ethnic field recording. He and his group lived in a house out in the [San Fernando] Valley, so I wanted to take a portable rig and record the band in the house, and use the different rooms in the house as isolation - very slight. The vocals get done in the bathroom. The drums are set up in the living room. The horn gets played in the garden, all this stuff. And we went over there and set it up, and did tracks that way.? thought they sounded good, but suddenly he was of the opinion that I was just trying to be a cheapskate producer, and not do any studio time. So I said' "Well, you want to go in the studio? Let's go." So -

MG: There's a little bit of it on the album, isn't there?
Yeah. There's some stuff off of a cassette machine that we wanted to have in there - "Dust Blows Forward, Dust Blows Back."
MG: And "The Blimp." That's yours.
I was in the studio milting some other tapes, and the band that's playing on "The Blimp" is actually the Mothers Of Invention. The vocal on "The Blimp" was recorded by telephone. He had just written these lyrics, and he had one of the guys in the band recite it to me over the phone. I taped it in the studio, and recorded it onto the piece of tape that I had up at the time, which was my track. So, that's how that came about.
MG: And now your version of "The Blimp" is out on the re-release version of Weasels Ripped My Flesh, too.
It's also going to be on this new episode of You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore. The piece is called "Charles Ives." We used to play it on the '68-'69 tour.
DM: in your so-called orchestral music, do you have visual components going on in your mind while you're composing?
I always think of something.
DM:A lot of composers hate the idea of any sort of program element. That's because program music is very old-fashioned, kind of like the cuckoo-in-the-meadow-from-Beethoven syndrome, but the audience consumes music largely pictorially. They make up their own mental picture, so why shouldn't the composer have a little input?
DM: So in the case of "The Food Gathering in Post-industrial America, " you were trying to create scurrying sounds?
Well, when we did it, the sounds themselves were created just as sounds, but when I listened to it, it seemed to me they conjured up this picture of desperate post-yuppies scrounging just through little, you know, nubs of used Pringles and stuff.
DM: what about "The Girl in the Magnesium Dress"? That's a strange piece.
Yeah, it was made from dust.
DM: The dress?
The piece was made from Synclavier digital dust. It's hard to explain, but when you look at the G page on the Synclavier, you'll see note names and numbers, but that's not all that lives on a track. There's subterranean information which can only be viewed when you go out of the user-friendly part of the machine and into the mysterious world of XPL programming. At that point, you can see these things that live on the track that are giving secret instructions to the machine telling it what to do. One classification of these secret instructions is something called "G numbers," which would be derived if you plugged in a guitar. They have this guitar unit that you can plug in, and besides recording the note that you play, it records a bunch of data in the form of G numbers. It's very complicated to explain what G numbers do, but they're not exactly notes. So we found a way to convert bunches of G numbers into note blanks. And G numbers occupy points in time. They indicate that something happened on the guitar string at a certain point in time. It takes a little piece of eternity and slides it up, and if your finger moved, there's a G number that says what your finger did besides just playing the note. So we converted this dust into something that I could then edit for pitch, and the dust indicated a rhythm. So what? did was take the rhythm of the dust and impose pitch data on the dust and thereby move the inaudible G number into the world of audibility with a pitch name on it. That's how "Magnesium Dress" was built.
DM: So-called serious music isn't often recognized as being funny, and even when a Mozart or a Beethoven or somebody puts in a little joke, the audience sits with a very straight face. Why is it that either composers or audiences have limited the range that they'll allow to be expressed or heard?
It's difficult to summarize audience behavior in general on a worldwide level. The

audiences that I'm most familiar with are the ones in the United States, and most of them are of the rock and roll variety, and they do have a sense of humor. What I do know about the U.S. classical audience is, basically, they are not there to hear the music, they are there to see who else showed up.It's a social event more than a musical event.They will go to a concert based on whether there is a star conductor or if there is an acceptable brand-name familiar composer on the program,but most of these people who go to these concerts in the United States haven't a clue as to what's going on. The main event of the evening is intermission, where they go out and piddle around with the white wine in the lobby. One would not expect them to be riddled with humor, especially since many of them happen to be Republicans and you know how they are.

DM: Do you think that's true of a Frank Zappa audience at a premiere of an orchestral piece?

Well, that audience probably is going to come largely from the world of rock and roll. There'll be crossover people. I would imagine that in Germany the audience for this piece is going to be derived mostly from fans of the band. Those fans who like the instrumental music on the tours would be attracted to this show. The ones who want to hear "Titties and Beer," they're going to be radically disappointed. There'll be a certain number of serious music concertgoers that will be there because they might have bought season tickets to the festival or something like that, but I expect that the bulk of the audience is going to be the same people that we play for at the rock shows.

DM: Let's talk about the upcoming German festival. Someone the other night described the Ensemble Modern as your new band.

I wish! One of the things they studiously avoid is having so much to do with any given composer that a composer will influence their ability to have a varied repertoire. There are other ensembles that have been welded to a composer of a certain school and wind up regretting it. And I think that their way is the best. They play all different kinds of music by all different composers, and they have a big repertoire and a busy touring schedule, and I think it would be a big mistake for them to get welded to what I do.

MG: Where did the idea of using the didgeridoo and the coffee can and water come from?

Well, a long time ago, we had a contact mic that we put on a Sparkletts bottle, and we got this really close-up sound of this horrible gurgling, glugging stuff. I used it as a sample on the'88tour in a lot of songs. So it seemed to me the idea of bubble-like sounds of all densities and magnitudes could be used as interesting source material for a composition. Because the musicians in this ensemble take everything so seriously - and I mean seriously: If you tell them to scrape their instrument or do something weird to their instrument, they don't look at you out of the comer of their eye, they'll just do it, and do it very seriously. The oboe player was blowing bubbles, and when I suggested that she take her didgeridoo and stick it into a pot of water and grunt through it and blow bubbles at the same time, she didn't say, "You're out of your mind. I'm a lady. I shouldn't do that!" She got the didgeridoo, and a couple of the other guys went out and got the little jug of water, and she knew that she was advancing the science of music like every player ever has, but the sound made me laugh so much I had to leave the room while she was recording it. I couldn't believe it. I'd imagined it would be fairly grotesque when I suggested she do it, but when I heard it, I couldn't stop laughing. I was spoiling the tape. I had to leave. You know, "Just do a bunch of these, and I'll come back." We expect that it's going to be one of the more enjoyable portions of the concert in Frankfurt, because it's going to be miked through the six-channel system, so that means the illusion for the audience is that they will have the experience of sitting inside of the container of water that she is blowing bubbles into.

DM: what are some of the technical challenges of combining the Ensemble Modern with the Synclavier? Is it also going to be making some of the sounds?

There's going to be a six-channel playback of some of the material generated on the

Synclavier that will be used as background for the dancers. It's about 15 or 20 minutes of the show, this piece called "Beat the Reaper." That will be reproduced from a Sony 33-24. All the concerts will have a six-channel P.A. system, and all the musicians onstage will be miked in such a way that they can be positioned around the audience in a kind of interesting spatial perspective.Plus, there's this device called "the hoop," which you can think of as a six-channel fish-pole microphone which can engulf a performer. It's a ring with six microphones around it, and each one of them feeds a different speaker in the hall. It's designed so that you can approach a soloist with this device. You can go up to a performer, put it over his head, go up and down his body while he's playing, and do all kinds of spatial tricks with it.

DM: How is the hoop operated?

A person with a strong arm and a will to succeed [laughs] will wander about the stage as I aim him in different directions. During the improvised sections that I'm going to conduct, I'll also be conducting the "hoop meister." And if I point over there, he'll go over. It's kind of like a butterfly net, you know: "Go over and bag that guy over there." And the house mixer is instructed that at those times when the hoop is in operation he is to do a cross-fade between all of the mikes on the entire Ensemble. They get faded down, and the only thing that's left in the P.A. is the six mikes inside the hoop. So you get this zoom-in effect. All the audio is focused on that one soloist.

DM: The concert is a great honor. How often is your stuff being done around the world?

Gail would know. We get requests monthly for various things.

MG: Do you say yes to everything?

Sure. There's going to be a CD of the Cincinnati Wind Ensemble, who wants to record "Envelopes" and something else. We just gave permission for that. There are a lot of requests for regional orchestras that want to play "Dupree's Paradise" or "Perfect Stranger." Usually, the things that they've heard already on a CD are the things they want to play. Usually, they are for smaller orchestras. Nobody wants to tackle the big things, because they're too expensive to rehearse, with the exception of this orchestra in Germany that's going to be playing "Bogus Pomp."

MG: What's your best-selling album?

Sheik Yerbouti.

MG: Without re-issues? Did anything significantly outsell -

I don't think anything has outsold Sheik Yerbouti, partly because "Bobby Brown Goes Down" keeps becoming a hit every ten years.

MG: Do you understand why?

No. Last year in Austria it was number one. It was top ten in Germany, and I think it was back on the charts again in Norway. For no apparent reason, it was back. For those of you who are ever interested in odd things that will happen in the future, we just got a request from Sweden to do a Swedish translation of "Penis Dimension" to be sung by a girl. We're going to let them go ahead and do it. The idea of a Swedish cover on that is pretty fascinating. The Swedes are odd in terms of the things that they choose to cover. Some jazz performer there in the '70s wrote words to "Toads of the Short Forest" and recorded it.

DM: Who does covers of your stuff in America?

Nobody.

MG: Are you planning to do any more touring?

Not if I can help it.

MG: What was your reaction to the GrandMothers, the old Mothers Of Invention?

I thought it was pathetic.

MG: Maybe you should do a Frank Zappa band without Frank Zappa. Just send them out on the road to play your music.

Well, there's been talk of doing that with this Zappa's Universe Project that was done in

New York. They're trying to organize a tour of that, but it doesn't look like it's going very well, because there's no money behind it. You can't put a band together to go and play hard music without rehearsal, and nobody wants to rehearse without getting paid, so I doubt whether it's going to happen. Probably the Zappa's Universe Project is a one-shot deal.

MG: But that was extremely ambitious with all different kinds of ensembles, right? what about just a rock band?

It's not easy to put together a rock band for any purpose. It's more difficult to put together a rock band to play hard music, and the hardest thing of all is to get a band booked into any venue with a promoter who is not sure he's going to sell tickets. Although I think there might be a market for such a band, you would be doing a lot of arm-twisting to get promoters to put up cash to bring it out. if there's a name attached to it, that name being somebody who is coming onstage, there's a whole different marketplace, but if it's just Band X going out to play the tunes of....

MG: But what about some of the great players who've played with you? I'd think people would come out to see it.

I think people would come out to see it, but you have to convince the promoter. He's the guy who has to put up the down payment.

MG: Because it seems as if the venues that you were playing got bigger and bigger and bigger over the years.

Yeah, but I think it had partly to do with the fact that I was going to be at the venue. I mean, if I'm not going to be at the venue, then I'm not sure that they will stick it in a big venue.

DM: Did you just grow to hate touring?

No.I just got old and ill and not prepared to put up with any kind of travel. Traveling for me is really very uncomfortable, especially in the United States since they have this ridiculous law about no smoking in airplanes. It's an uncivilized way to comport yourself on a trip, so this event in Europe was really a special thing just to go do the six concerts or whatever it's going to be over there.

MG: You mentioned that you'd discovered in your archives a large number of hours of music recorded at the Fillmore East in 1970 or 71.

I didn't realize the volume of releasable material from those tapings: the album Playground Psychotics which will be coming out later this year....

MG: You said it was a surprise how much musical material you have. Have you listened to everything you've recorded?

No. I've got reels of tape in the vault that still have the original silver gaffer's tape from the night that they were stuck in the box at the end of a gig and haven't even been opened. Virtually the entire 1980 tour, which was recorded eight-track, is untouched by human hinds. The '73-'74 tour with Ruth, and Chester, and George Duke, the bulk of those tapes from the United States and Europe, they're all four tracks, are untouched.

MG: what about the band with Jean-Luc Ponty?

That was '72. There's a few tapes of that. That's also four-track.

DM: Did you record almost everything you did on tour? Every night?

Starting in 1969, Dick Kunc, who was the engineer on some of the early albums, built this little James Bond suitcase recording apparatus. He built a briefcase. He took a couple of Shure mixers, and packed it all in there, and we had a Uher, about this big, 7-1/2 ips. He accompanied us on part of the U.S. tour that year, and would sit in the corner of the room with earphones on and try to do a mix on whatever we were doing. I mean, it was impossible, but there are tapes. The first volume of You Can't Do That Onstage was mostly that. Those kind of tapes from the 1969 band. When we did the Pauley Pavilion recording I had just bought this Scully four-track, and that was the first of the four-track recordings that we did. We recorded four-track for, I guess, ten years, nine years. Then we

went to eight-track in 1980. Then we went to a single 24-track machine packed in a box in '81. In '82,1 bought the Beach Boys' mobile truck, and put a pair of 24-tracks - in fact we had three. One as a standby, in case the Ampexes blew up, and we used that for a number of years. In '84,1 bought the digital 24-track, and we did a tour and recorded that 24-track digital. And in '88,1 had two 24-track digital machines, and we did 48-track live recordings of the '88 tour.

DM: Do you have a good memory of what's good from each of those tours?

I used to, but I don't think about it much any-more. I used to know the name of the gig, and what song was good on a certain occasion, and I used to be more involved in it, but I'm reaching the end of that phase of my interest in music.

DM: So, after the German event, you don't necessarily want to resurrect some of these good performances?

It's hard to find a reason or a market or a logic to package it, with the conclusion of the You Can't Do That Onstage series. That was always promised to be six volumes, and it's done. The two remaining live-like objects that will be corning out, Playground Psychotics and this other thing called Ahead Of Their Time, which is the '68 band, I don't know whether there's gonna be a market for anything more than that.

MG: I think there is a market for anything. Earlier in your career it was much easier to play your whole catalogue in order, and now, as you're releasing more of the stuff from the old years, I have to go back and revise my ideas about what you were doing because you're throwing in more pieces of the puzzle.

One of the arguments against putting out that old material is that there's not that many new titles that could be extracted from there. If I were to release that material, it would just be yet an- other version of "Pound for Brown" or yet another version of "Trouble Every Day." For live performances, there's a limited universe of songs with titles. What there is of a unique nature is that on every occasion, there would be some improvised something or other that would happen during the show that would be a one-off deal. You would have to do a lot of gathering to collate that stuff, and put together albums of songs that exist of only one kind. The '74 band did a lot of that.

MG: One of the things I like about the albums that are just a single concert, it's like, oh, that's a document of what you experienced that night. I really liked that. Although maybe you can edit the best songs, it's been a pleasure for me to hear entire shows.

That to me is excruciating, because when I've listened to those, it's hard for me to imagine one show that had so many good things in it that you'd want to release the whole show. There are always mistakes. With live stuff, you want to optimize the sound. You also want to optimize the solos. You've done a tour for four months, and you know that on a certain night, a certain song is played really, really well. It's a shame not to take that version of it and edit it in into the thing. I just think since it's all live, what's the difference whether it came from the same building or not?

DM: Do you miss playing the guitar?

Maybe a teenie weenie, teenie tiny, weenie weenie bit, but generally not. Every once in a while I might want to pick it up and play something, but, you know, it hurts. Just manipulating it.

DM: Your calluses.

Yeah.

DM: Marshmallows.

Yeah.

DM: You can get those back.

Yeah, but it takes months to really develop and get your chops up to the point where you can say, "Hey, yeah, I'm a guitar player again." If I had to, I could pick up the guitar and play some kind of a solo right now, but I don't know whether or not I would like to have it

stored for future consumption. I mean, you can do instant entertainment to amuse your friends or baffle people on the moment, but compared to some of the things I've done on tape that I think are really good, I'm just so far away from what I was able to do when I had some skill. It's disappointing, and I hate to do things hall-assed.

DM: Do you like ever to listen to your old guitar work?

A few things, yeah. I'll listen and go, "How in the fuck did I do that?" 'Cause I just really have no idea how to do that.

MG: Are you going to play guitar at the festival in Frankfurt?

They want me to, but the logistics are very difficult, because in order to do it I'd have to bring a guitar roadie. I'd have to bring all my armaments, and it would mean I would have to eat up part of their daily rehearsal schedule to do a soundcheck for a fuzz-tone guitar, which is not something that is a pleasurable sensation for anybody. We're on such a tight schedule, the way the concerts are set up. We're going to need every minute we can just to make the PA. work and get the acoustic instruments balanced. The other thing is that the expectation level would be so high. If I walk out onstage with a guitar, then people will expect me to do something worthwhile, and here you've got this fantastic group playing' and then this has-been guitar player walks up and goes [imitates weak fanfare] "Ta da."

MG: I have a feeling that members of the audience wouldn't go, "Ugh, a has-been."

Well, in Germany it's different. First of all, it's a very critical audience. Second, we've played there so much, and it seems like everybody in the country bootlegged the shows. They know what we played when we were there. We have some very dedicated fans in Germany, and I'm sure, without being malicious about it, they would listen to what I was doing and just know that it wasn't as good as what I used to be able to do and then, in the typical German fashion, would reject it.

MG: You sang "Sofa" in German.

We learned it phonetically. The translation was done by a girl who used to be our babysitter. She was from Munich, and apparently not a very good translator. People look at what it means in English, and then listen to the German words, and they've told me that the translation is laughable. And then they tell me what it really should be in German, and it's unsingable.

MG: They ought to be appreciative. Did you ever sing in any other language?

Dutch. All we had to learn in Dutch was just about a paragraph's worth of this one song, and the audience was so amused that anybody would attempt to do it. That particular tour, I tried to convince Mark and Howard that it was a good idea to learn these things phonetically, because most American groups, if they go and play in an-other country~ make no attempt to communicate in the native language, and I thought it would be a worthwhile gesture and probably a ground-breaking thing to do. In fact, in Germany, it was groundbreaking, because I had reports afterward that people in Germany who were musicians who wanted to do rock and roll had never considered that their language would work for rock. I didn't realize that they weren't doing rock stuff in German. If they did rock, they would be doing bad phonetic English rock lyrics.

DM: In terms of future recordings is it going to be the German event and possibly Phaze 111? Is that happening?

We're planning two CDs of the German event, or material generated by the German event, or material that involves me and the Ensemble Modern, whether it includes things that were recorded last year. Some combination thereof. And Phaze III, which now looks like it's going to be two CDs. Those are the things that are on the drawing boards now, plus The Lost Episodes, that's also coming out. The Lost Episodes is all the unreleased studio cuts, Volume One.

MG: let's talk about your ideas about time.

Well, I think that everything is happening all the time, and the only reason why we think of time linearly is because we are conditioned to do it. That's because the human idea of stuff

is it has a beginning and it has an end.I don't think that's necessarily true. You think of time as a constant, a spherical constant -
MG:-in which-
- Everything's happening all the time, always did, always will....
MG: So this coffee cup -
- Was always full, and always empty -
MG: - and it's always being drunk and it's always being heated -
- And it's always being thrown, and the guy was always painting it, and so on and so forth. Everything is always.
MG: why does this empty cup make sense tome?
I don't know.
MG: You know what I mean, though?
Is that a Zen question?
MG: No, why do I go, "Oh, I have already - the cup that drank no longer appears to be full."
Well, that's because it is not full at this particular version of -
MG: Our perceptions?
We're dealing with time in a quasi-practical manner. We have devised our own personal universe and lifestyle that is ruled by time sliced this way, and we progress from notch to notch, day by day, and you just learn to meet your deadlines that way. That's only for human convenience. That, to me, is not a good explanation of how things really work. That's only the human perception version of how this work. It seems just as feasible to me that everything is happening all the time. And whether you believe your coffee cup is full or not is irrelevant. It's like - here's another way to explain it. What something is depends more on when it is than anything else. You can't define something accurately until you understand when it is.
MG: When in time.
Yeah, when is what. Without the perfect understanding of when, you've got nothing to deal with, see? 'Cause you analyze that cup of coffee a little bit earlier, and it's full. In a few minutes, you'll kick it over, and it won't even exist anymore. The state of the cup is determined by when you're perceiving it.
DM: which means that the future has already happened.
Yeah. And the reason why I feel so strongly about this is, you know, this is one of the better explanations for why people can have premonitions, because instead of looking ahead, they're just looking around. You don't have to look ahead to see the future. You can look over there.
DM: That was going to be my next question. What limits our perceptions of other things or other times or the future?
I think you devise your own limits for your own personal convenience. There are some people who wish to have limits, and they'll invent as many boxes for themselves as they want. It's like, you know, men invented armor. They wanted to protect themselves from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and so forth. And people do the same thing psychically and psychologically. They build their own armor. They build their own rathole, whatever it is. And they choose their existence. Whether they do it consciously or whether it is helped along by a government or an education system, somebody is helping to shape this imaginary box you live in, but it doesn't have to be there.
DM: Then what are the limits to our being able to understand what the whole purpose of any of our lives is?
Well, why do you have to? I think that when is a very important thing, but "what the fuck" is also a very important thing to ask. Just keep asking, "What the fuck?" I mean, why the fuck bother? See what I mean? The important thing is, deal with the when. When will open a lot

of shit for you. "What the fuck" really makes it easier to deal with it when you understand the when.

DM: You sound like a very mystical but common-sense guy, because you've always talked about the common sense solution as always the best solution to anything, and yet this is very mystical.

Why is it mystical? Can you understand that when is important? What's mystical about that?

DM: Well, not just that question so much as the idea that time is a Moebius vortex

-No, the shape of the universe is a Moebius vortex I believe that. Time is a spherical constant. Now imagine a Moebius vortex inside a spherical constant, and you've got my cosmology. But when is very important.

MG: How does music composition fit into that?

It's just something that you do. You know, I can do it, so I do it. You can draw cartoons and so you do it, and you can make people laugh and you do it. And that's what you do. And if somebody tried to keep you from doing it, you'd kill them, wouldn't you?

MG: Yes. See, I judge the universe by pencil mileage.

That's a pretty linear kind of thing. And the callus on my finger. I used to get that when I wrote with a pen.In fact,this finger right here has a permanent dent right in that bone from just holding that nub of a pen, and going [choking, strugging sound] like with those little dots, and now I get cramps in this arm from holding my thumb like this to do a certain move on the keypad to make the Synclavier do something. But in the larger scheme of things, what's a little nub in your finger or a twisted thumb? So long as somebody gets a laugh out of it, what the fuck? Z

Jazz From Hell

By Robert L. Doerschuk & Jim Aikin
From A Definitive Tribute to Frank Zappa (Best of Guitar Player, 1994)

In late 1986, Zappa released Jazz From Hell*, an album of diabolically dense musings concocted on the Synclavier. This was all the excuse* Keyboard *needed to feature him on their February 1987 cover.-- Editor*

Frank Zappa was born too soon. After years of running sidemen through impossible charts and resigning himself to the distractions and imperfections of live performance, he's finally got what he wants: an instrument on which he can nail down the complex sound blends, polyrhythms, and lines that could formerly come together only in his head.

No, it's not a souped-up guitar. Though he is known as a guitarist of formidable originality, Zappa hasn't touched the instrument much during the past two years. These says you'll most likely find him at his home studio, bent over the keyboard of a New England Digital Synclavier.

He's not necessarily giving up on live gigs, mind you. In fact, his upcoming ten-album compilation of concert performances is designed to show young listeners raised on sequencers and drum machines that the essence of real-time playing lies beyond the reach of studio hermits. But as far back as his first albums with the Mothers Of Invention, Zappa displayed a double creative mentality. As an improviser on guitar he could hold his own against Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Beck, and the best of the era. His strongest episodes, though, were often his written pieces, which required reading chops and discipline to a point beyond the reach of your typical blooz-'n'-boogie droner.

Music too complex, sidemen unpredictable, don't want to compromise. What do you do? It's an old problem. Forty years ago, as reported in last month's *Keyboard* [Jan. '87], Conlon Nancarrow settled it by devoting himself to writing pieces for player piano, a much more dependable medium for realizing his intricate ideas than a bunch of skeptical musicians. Zappa has found a solution in the Synclavier, as heard on his most recent releases, including *Frank Zappa Meets the Mothers of Prevention*, *Francesco Zappa*, and most recently *Jazz From Hell*.

The results of this meeting of mind and machine are quintessential Zappa, and yet they are as unpredictable as anything he has done before. By making full use of the Synclavier's sampling, sequencing, and keyboard assignment capabilities, he finds new sources of inspiration and gains greater control over his resources than in any previous project. And since control is crucial when dealing with complicated ideas, these LPs represent a major step for Zappa the composer -- a step closer to what he has been trying to do for years.

On *Jazz*, for instance, unmistakable Zappaisms abound. The timbre and contour of the them in "Night School," the ensemble textures and harmonies in "The Beltway Bandits" and the title track, the quick vibraphone flurries in "While You Were Art II," the oral-cavity percussion sounds and alternation between long passages of simple upbeats and sudden

metrical spasms -- all these and many other elements reflect ideas he has pursued on projects as far back as the '60s. The difference is that the Synclavier has liberated Zappa from a lot of old shackles.

Readers of *Guitar Player* have had several encounters with Zappa over the past couple of decades. Certainly most *Keyboard* regulars are familiar with his work too, if only through the long string of brilliant keyboardists who have filed in and out of his bands: George Duke, Eddie Jobson, Ian Underwood, Don Preston, Tommy Mars, Peter Wolf, and so on. In the tradition of Miles Davis and Art Blakey, Zappa has established himself -- perhaps not intentionally -- as a mentor for talented newcomers. Unfortunately, these hotshots tend to come and go, for a simple reason: To get a gig playing Zappa music, you have to be a Class-A whiz kid on your instrument. Word gets around, stardom beckons for the erstwhile sideman, and suddenly it's time to start auditioning again.

Such is life for Zappa, whose career has taken some unorthodox turns. He has been involved in a lawsuit with one record company, severed connections with another label when they refused to release a song he had written about military conscription, fired musicians for using drugs, testified before Congress, written an article titled "Edgard Varèse: Idol of My Youth" for *Stereo Review*, "played" a bicycle on an old Steve Allen show, been arrested for pornography, and been assaulted and pushed offstage by an irate fan in London. He has composed orchestral works that have been played on both sides of the Atlantic, performing one of them with an orchestra under the baton of Zubin Mehta; the concert began with Zappa's spoken cue, "Hit it, Zubin." He has also written songs that ridicule, satirize, or (he insists) extol hippies, fascists, drunks, druggies, Scientologists, truck drivers, disco music, Jewish girls, Catholic girls, Valley girls, Montana, France, and the Illinois enema bandit. He started out as a drummer with a group called the Blackouts, then began playing guitar at age 18. He wrote his first movie soundtrack in 1960, for *The World's Greatest Sinner*. In addition to the previously mentioned keyboardists, his bands have included such musical heavyweights as violinists Don "Sugarcane" Harris and Jean-Luc Ponty, drummers Terry Bozzio and Aynsley Dunbar, and guitarists Adrian Belew and Steve Vai.

We Spoke with Zappa in December '86, twenty years and four months after the release of his debut album, *Freak Out!*, five after our June '80 interview with him and the two keyboardists he was then working with, and just as he was assembling a new ten-LP package, You *Can't Do That On Stage Anymore*. This collection features live cuts recorded over two decades by Zappa and his various bands. Any similarity to the recent Springsteen five-album retrospective is coincidental. When we joked that by releasing twice as large a compilation he was doing Bruce Springsteen one better, Zappa responded offhandedly, "Well, I don't think there will be any comparison between his live set and this thing. This is going to be a real musician's album. I think I'm going him at least ten better."

* * * * *

Was all of *Jazz From Hell* recorded on Synclavier?
No. There's one cut on there, a guitar solo, that was done with a band on the '82 tour. That's "St. Etienne." Everything else is 100 percent Synclavier.

The Synclavier has direct-to-hard-disk recording options that would let you, for example, have somebody come in and actually play saxophone, and it would still be recorded on Synclavier. Was any of that done, or was it all input directly?

No, it was all done with samples and synthesis. It was all typed in or performed in on the keyboard, or performed in using [Roland] Octapads.

Typing it in must be a fairly slow process.
Well, I worked for eight months on this album. So there's quite a bit of work in it.

It sounds like a real breakthrough album, with the vocabulary you used before, but distilled in a very new way.
Wait until you hear the stuff that's coming up. When I first started with the Synclavier, we didn't have a very advanced sampling system. We had mono sampling with not a lot of RAM. Then, at great expense, I picked up the rest of the new sampling gear. We were doing stereo samples here in the studio before Synclavier even had stereo sampling. We figured out a way to do it, and it changed a lot of ways that you could write for the instrument. So the compositions that are on *Jazz From Hell* already sound old to me, compared to what I'm doing now.

There are some places where we can hear that it's an acoustic guitar sample or a saxophone sample or something quite clearly. But in other places it's not so clear. On "Night School," for example, there's a sustained sound that has a piano attack and something else spliced onto it.
It's actually not spliced; it's simultaneous. It's a stereo sample, a combination of trumpet with pitch-bend and grand piano. The piano notes are not short. They attack, and then as they ring off, you get to hear an unusual noise, which is the acoustic piano playing bends. That's a real easy thing to do on the Synclavier.

So even though you're calling them stereo samples, they weren't always used to create a stereo field.
Well, when I say stereo sample, on the Synclavier you have four partials. You can have a different sound on each partial, which means that when you strike one note, you can have four completely different sounds come out, or you can have two stereo pairs. Or you can have a stereo pair and two other sounds at random. In the case of that particular sound, it is a mono piano and a mono trumpet sample. But the accompanying keyboard sounds are all stereo grand piano.

Have you ever sampled your own guitar and used that?
I've sampled a few notes. I've never plugged into the thing and said, "Now I'm going to sample myself." We extracted them from digital tapes of live performances. A couple of good feedback notes are plopped in. I haven't really gone hog-wild with guitar samples, but Dweezil [Zappa's son] did a whole guitar sampling session last year, and the stereo fuzz-tone samples are just now being trimmed and built into patches, so I'll have a whole assortment of characteristic heavy metal noises.

Do you ever use a guitar synthesizer controller with the Synclavier?
I've tried it, but because of the style I play and the way my hands land on the guitar, it has never felt comfortable to me. I've tried maybe three or four different systems, but none of them drove me crazy.

In general, do you like working with samples, or if you could get good synthetic reproductions that eliminated all of the associated problems, would you prefer that?
I couldn't imagine that any kind of a synthetic reproduction would be able to give you the type of nuance that you get out of a sample. For string pads and things like that, you could fake it pretty good. For bogus globulant brass ensemble stuff, that kind of orchestral

cheese, you could get away with FM. And Minimoog bass sounds and things like that usually sound best if they're actually coming out of a Minimoog. What we've done to get those kinds of sounds is sample the Minimoog. You see, with samples, not only are you getting the sound of the instrument, you're getting the ability to capture the instrument in different types of air spaces. For example, we have both dry and ambient room sound percussion noises, and dry and ambient wind. Even with the classical guitar, different types of environments make a big difference.

It also takes a lot more work to get the multi-sample of the acoustic guitar laid out on the keyboard, rather than just calling up. . .
. . . an *E* string, and make it stretch as far as it can go? Well, you know, I'm a dedicated guy. I like to spend the time to get the thing right.

How much time do you spend on that aspect of the musical process, as opposed to composing?
It's seasonal work. I'm not the one who actually trims the samples. Bob Rice, my assistant, does that. I build the patches. I'll tell him that I want a certain group of sounds. Our backlog of samples to trim is humongous, because it's far easier to record the samples. We record them on the [Sony] 1610, and then he puts them into the Synclavier, left side first, then right side, and then lines them up to make stereo samples. The easy part is recording the samples. The hard part is transferring and trimming and cataloguing. He's probably -- let's be kind -- eight months behind on the sample trimming. And as the samples get trimmed and organized, I build them into various types of patches, according to what composition I'm working on. We have things called pintos, which are mix-and-match patches. Instead of having a patch that is just a saxophone, for example, you can have a patch that is a few notes of the sax, a few of a clarinet, a few of an oboe, a few of a trombone, all different instruments, appearing on different notes, all of them on the keyboards.

How would you use something like that?
Well, that gives you instant orchestration. If you were to play an ordinary piano part on the keyboard with a patch like that, depending on where you put your finger, you'd get a different instrument coming at you from a different stereo location. It turns what would ordinarily be a mono-sounding keyboard part in to a whole ensemble playing stuff.

Do you plan it out in advance, so that you know that here you're going to want two sax notes on these two keys, or do you just put a bunch of things on the keyboard and wing it?
Well, you start off by winging it, and then you refine it, depending on how the orchestration is going to lay. You've got a lot of possibilities for laying things under the keys. You can mix orchestral percussion with industrial noises, like drills and hammers and saws and vacuum tanks and things like that, all in the same patch. You can combine them and do some wonderful stuff with it.

Have you released any music yet that has the drills and saws?
Oh, yeah. That's on *Jazz from Hell*. You'll hear a noise in there which is a sample called TANK.REL. It's the release of a vacuum tank in a woodworking shop. And there are some other things. Nail guns are used in there.

Is that the stuff that sounds like just a slightly strange drum set?
Yeah. That's part of our industrial percussion setup.

What percentage of *Jazz from Hell* was input by typing, and why would you choose one type of input over another?
There are three different ways to type in. One is in a language called Script, which I don't know. I don't use that at all. Bob Rice can type Script. But that's more like writing a computer program, so it has no charm for me. Another way is with their Music Printing program. You can enter or delete notes with the cursor while looking at real music on staves. And if you want to write in tuplets -- if you have 7 over 3 or something like that -- it's real easy to do it that way. You just make a couple of marks and then redraw the screen. You now have edit blocks that correspond to a septuplet over three quarters, or whatever you want. It could be anything. Then you just enter the pitches. For that kind of stuff, that's the easiest way for me to do it. The third way to type is a facility called the G Page. The screen is split into three segments, and you can display three tracks of data at the same time on the screen. In each of those three units, you have three columns of information. The left-hand one tells you the start time of the note. In other words, the beginning of the piece would be beat 1, and all the subsequent beats have numbers. This data reads out either in seconds, beats, or SMPTE numbers; that's all selectable. The center column gives you the name of the pitch an a number which tells you the octave that the pitch lives in. And the right-hand column gives you the duration. All that is editable, so you can move the cursor around, add and delete notes, change start times, which changes the rhythm, and change the pitch and the octave and how long the note lasts. I divide my time between doing stuff on the G Page and doing stuff in the Music Printing.

Does it print out the velocity of the key or tell you what voice you're addressing?
That's coming in the next generation of software. They're going to have a facility on there where you can type in velocity. But we've found a way to add velocity to something that's just typed in flat. It's a little complicated to explain, but I can put in dynamic information after the fact.

So New England Digital is still dealing with velocity in an after-the-fact way.
Well, you know, they continually claim that they're understaffed and they can't do everything all at once. They do ask users for their comments about what they'd like to see on there. God knows, I've filled out a batch of those comment cards, but I've yet to see any of them implemented.

What kinds of suggestions have you made?
Little things that really shouldn't be that difficult. If you're looking at the Music Printing, and you're in a certain bar, there should be a way to hit a stroke on a key that would place a flag in the program, and then when you hit the play command, you should be able to play right from the point that you were looking at on the screen. And vice versa: You should be able to listen to your sequence, stop it at a certain point, and have it draw the actual music printing data right from that point. That would make life a lot easier.

And that's still not implemented?
It's not implemented. I'm not a programmer, but to me it just sounds like a flag. There are a few other minor details that need to be addressed, but they've got a heavy hardware program going. That's where they make their money. Direct-To-Disk recording and all that, that's high-ticket stuff, and they've been working hard to make that thing practical.

In the abstract, an instrument like the Synclavier is capable of doing so much, it must be tough for them to figure out what to make their top priority.
Well, I gave a suggestion to one of their guys that they ought to give some thought to the low end of the consumer spectrum. I have nothing but praise for the device, except for the

fact that it's as expensive as fuck. The basic synthesizer system, minus all the sampling and the rest of that stuff, is already so unbelievably expensive, and a DX7, generally speaking, will make a bigger variety and cleaner variety of FM sounds than the basic Synclavier. So I suggested that they do something about improving their tracking filter on the FM side, so that they might be able to come up with something in the lower price range that will introduce consumers to their way of doing things, because once you get one and realize the different musical things that you can do with it, the chances are very good that you will build onto the system. If they don't pay any attention to the low end of the scale, they're excluding all those beginners who are first-time customers, because all the rest of the stuff is so expensive. Before you can make it do what you hear on *Jazz from Hell*, you've got to spend a quarter of a million dollars. And to go direct to disk, those prices start at $50,000, going up to a quarter of a million dollars. So if you were to get a Michael Jackson-size unit, you could spend close to half a million dollars, and that limits the number of units worldwide that you can sell. That's why they ought to think about doing something less expensive, so that they can stay in business long enough that they can repair it when it goes down. I'm thinking ten or 15 years down the road, because I expect to still have this thing and still be making music on it, and if there is no NED down the road, then what have you got?

Have you ever worked with any of the lower-end gear that has some similar functions?
Well, I had a [Yamaha] DX5 and a rack of [Yamaha] TX modules. I also use the [Axxess Systems] Mapper, which is MIDIed to the Synclavier. We've been able to get some truly frightening things out of that. I also have a [Yamaha] CS-80, I've got Electrocomps, Minimoogs, Synkeys. . . . All the heavy-duty hardware that a rock and roll touring band would use, I've purchased and supplied to whoever the keyboard guy is who does the tour. So I know basically what the consumer end of the synthesizer stuff is like, even though I'm not a keyboard player and never expect to be. I am a composer, and as a composer you deal with timbre and other technical matters, and it pays to know what's available so that you can write for it..

When you're preparing to go out on tour, do you tell your keyboard players what patches you want them to use?
Well, it depends who the keyboard player is. Some things are real specific. If you're writing a composition and it has to be the sound of a marimba, you're not going to want to have the sound of anything else right there. It's got to be a marimba. If it's supposed to be brass, it's brass. That's what the composition calls for. You don't want to stick a string patch where the brass goes, because strings don't go ta-da-ta-da. Basically, those are the kind of instructions that I would give to whoever is playing it. We don't use too many Mars music synthesizer patches. There are certain points in the show where things get bizarre, and there are strange noises in there, but generally there's a tune being played. The timbre used for the tune tends to resemble a real instrument from the real world.

So you don't have to do a lot of programming for special effects that you wouldn't otherwise be able to get.
Well, my main desire from synthesizers is to provide orchestral-type textures, or orchestral effects that convey a musical message in the midst of a rock and roll context. One of the most elusive musical things that you can try and achieve in the real world is an acoustical balance between a rock and roll band blowing its brains out and anything that resembles a symphony orchestra. It's just not going to happen. You have to do that by magic. And synthesizers assist in that magic. The other thing, of course, is multi-track recording, where you can actually record symphonic instruments on one date, and record the fuzz-

tone guitar on another. In using these tools, I'm just trying to bring to the public some replica of what it is I hear in my head. As technology moves along, that's getting easier and easier to do.

Has technology also made it possible to hear more things in your head than you were hearing before?
Well, let's say that a person had never heard a bassoon in his life. And the day that he hears one he's either going to say, "That's the ugliest thing I've ever heard," or "That's God's instrument." Or maybe something in between. But you're going to have a response to an instrument. Every composer has some image in his mind of what he wants his stuff to sound like -- not just the composition, but the overall tonal quality of what he's writing. In my head I have an audio image, not just of the notes, but of the way the notes will sound played in an idealized air space, which is something you can't get in the real world. The closest you can get to it is a digital recording with digital control over imaginary audio ambience. When you can design rooms to your own specifications with a Lexicon, and then place your music in that space, that's getting pretty close to what it's really all about. It's not just the notes on paper that matter, but what they turn into when you start making air molecules move. If it's on paper, it's roughly the equivalent of a recipe for something to eat. The ingredients may sound good on paper, but how do you know whether or not you're going to like it until you eat it? It also resembles the blueprint for a building. A good composition will take into account that you need to have toilets, you need doors going in and out, windows, ventilation. You need all the basic stuff, and then all the rest of it is interior and exterior decorating.

But as you get more involved in electronic instruments, do the things that you're hearing change?
I was going to get to that. Obviously, if you're dealing only with the instruments to which most composers normally have access -- in other words, the known instruments -- you will tend to think in terms of what to do with a known instrument. The moment you get your hands on a piece of equipment like this, where you can modify known instruments in ways that human beings just never do, such as add notes to the top and bottom of the range, or allow a piano to perform pitch-bends or vibrato, even basic things like that will cause you to rethink the existing musical universe. The other thing you get to do is invent sounds from scratch. Of course, that opens up a wide range.
One of the most intriguing things about working with a Synclavier is what it lets you do with rhythm. That's always been one of my favorite things to investigate. It's possible to get accurate performances of the most ridiculous rhythmic combinations. I'll give you an example. I've been working in large tuplets recently. If you're in 3/4, I'd put in a tuplet -- say, a bar of 3/4 that has a 75-tuplet or 35-tuplet in it. You can hear that there's a waltz going on, but when these things occur, it's like, "What is that? Where do these things come from? Why does it still have a groove to it?" It still relates mathematically to something else that's going on in the bar. With this system, you can pick a random number, then take any size bar of music and divide it up into those components. You're going to have an 88-tuplet or an 87-tuplet. Or you can take a composition that has, say, ten bars of 4/4. The first bar you start with an 88-tuplet, the next bar is 87, 86, 85, 84, 83, 82, 81, something like that. You could never hand that to a musician on a piece of paper and say, "Here, do this."

Even on your early albums, you were handing musicians things that were, if not quite that difficult, at least going in the same direction.
Yeah, that's true. You can hand this to the musician, but what you get back is the problem. The spirit may be willing, but the flesh might say, "Uh-uh, this ain't gonna happen." That's pretty much the rule throughout the last twenty-odd years of my musical career. You can

ask for it, but the chances of getting it accurately performed are very, very small. And now I don't have to worry about that any more.

So electronic media have really freed you to get closer to your ideal, to what you're hearing.
It's really made that possible. The next question is whether anybody in the audience wants to hear it. That's the big problem, because the further out I get with these timbral combinations and the unusual rhythms, the further away it gets from any possibility of radio play. And without radio play or some kind of advertising for the album, nobody's even going to know it's there, let alone pick it up. Some people, when they hear it, they absolutely don't like it just on principle because it doesn't have that *boom, boom, boom* on the floor all the time. I'm delighted that I have the opportunity to go wandering around out in the zones of this thing. I would like it if I had some company out there.

You were talking about creating a specialized ambience with digital reverb, yet *Jazz from Hell* sounds relatively dry. What kind of processing, if any, did you use on that album?
There's a lot of real subtle processing. It is absolutely not dry. There are tricks to using echo. If you want something to really sound like it's echoing, then that's an obvious effect, like yelling into a cave, that kind of stuff. That tends to make things get soft around the edges. The way ambience is perceived in this album is, each composition has to exist in some sort of imaginary air space, and you don't want the air space to fight against the musical content. You don't just pick an echo program at random, then turn it on and say, "Now we've got air space." What we do is, for each piece, depending on how much transient information is in the piece or what style the piece is, we tailor at least three different rooms. In other words, we have a live echo chamber and two Lexicons. and that gives you the possibility of locating different types of orchestration in different types of imaginary rooms, and then combining those things to make the final stereo picture.

You're still using an actual echo chamber?
The reason we do that is that certain types of percussive sounds, when introduced into a digital reverb program that may be a long program, don't sound right. That program may be good for everything else in the composition that is not so spikey. But the spikey stuff in there tends to sound bogus. So what we do is use live echo quite often for the percussion-type things, and use echo programs with more harmonic content on the strings or brass or things whose duration you want to increase. An echo program actually increases the duration of notes on paper. you can write an eighth-note and play an eighth-note, and there's no reverb; the sample itself is dry. What you get is an eighth-note. But if you [...?] the eighth-note in a 35-meter room, that eighth-note is extended. When you're writing you have to bear that in mind. What you're going to do to it in the final processing and how loud different things are going to be in the mix changes considerably what your response is going to be to the composition as a whole. We fuss over that very much.

When you're starting on a very percussion-oriented piece, do you write the rhythm groove first, or the sustained material, or what?
It depends on what kind of composition it is. I work it all different ways. Sometimes I start with a picture of a completely finished event in my head, and then just go about achieving the event mechanically. Other times I might start with just a little beat, then I decide to lay something on top of it, and that grows into a monstrosity. Or I might hear three or four notes that would represent what you could call your hook, if there is such a thing in these tunes. And I build out from the hook.

Can you give us an example of each of those approaches on *Jazz from Hell*?
Well, "Night School" started off with just eight chords that I played in on the keyboard. Everything else came after that. And "While You Were Art II," that's really got a strange story to it. There's a song on the *Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar* album called "While You Were Out." A group at Cal Arts [California Institute of the Arts], led by a guy named Art Jarvinen, came to me and requested an arrangement of "While You Were Out" for their ensemble, so they could play it at a concert that they were giving in Los Angeles. So I had David Ocker, who was my assistant at that time, type into the Synclavier the actual transcription that Steve Vai did that is in the guitar book [*The Frank Zappa Guitar Book*, published by Hal Leonard]. That just gave me the chords and the melody line, which wasn't suitable for the instrumentation of their ensemble. Once the data was in there, then it was a matter of arranging it so that they could play it. So I put it through a bunch of permutations. For one thing, I squared off the rhythm to the nearest 32nd-note, instead of having all the tuplets and weird stuff going on. Then I hocketed the material, so that the line was bounced from instrument to instrument. And did a bunch of other stuff to it.
To aid in their performance, since it was already typed into the Synclavier, I produced a little practice cassette for them to play the piece by. When Art came to pick up the musical parts, he listened to it and he said, "There's no way that we can learn this in time for the show. It's too hard." So I said, "No problem. We'll just have the machine play it. All you do is go onstage and pretend that you're playing your instrument. You'll have wires coming out of your instruments, leading to some speakers, and play a cassette, and nobody will know the difference." Well, they did it. And guess what? Nobody knew the difference! The music critics of the *Los Angeles Times* didn't know, the man who was in charge of the concert series didn't know. The only person in that audience who knew was David Ocker, because he had typed it in. Nobody Knew! We've seen rock and roll videos where you have a model pretending to play an instrument. In this case, you have musicians pretending to play instruments. They were actually looking at the sheet music, and moving their hands the way you would normally do it.
But to make matters worse, the version that is on *Jazz from Hell* is not the version that they played. The version that they played had no samples. It was only FM synthesis. And even at that, nobody knew. It doesn't even sound like the version played with samples that's on the album. This is quite deluxe.

What kind of reaction did this performance draw?
It caused a scandal, to the point where three members of the group actually apologized to the musical community and swore that they would never do anything like that again. Instead, they should have been going, "Yeah, look at this! People who write about and criticize classical music can't even recognize a cheesy cassette." It wasn't even a digital tape that they played. It was a normal audio cassette played through a little P.A. system in this hall. And nobody knew that these people weren't playing the instruments. That, I think, is the real artistic statement of the piece. That's why it is called "While You Were Art."

Let's turn to the *Francesco* album, which was done before *Jazz from Hell*.
Right. There are no samples on *Francesco*. It's all straight Synclavier.

What inspired you to do that project, other than the fact that the 18th-century composer Francesco Zappa was your namesake?
It was just mere curiosity. I obtained the music and David Ocker typed it into the Synclavier. Then, on the first day, after he typed in Op. 1, and we listened to it, I thought, "Hey, that's a nice tune. I wonder what the rest of it sounds like." He spent about a month typing in a huge amount of these string trios -- they were all string trios, by the way. They sounded nice, so I thought, "Why not make an album out of it?"

Your approach to orchestrating it seemed quite restrained.
Well, I didn't want to go mondo on it. Basically, you're dealing with three-voice compositions. It's two melody lines, usually in harmony, plus the bass line. That's all I really had to work with. I didn't want to add any other data to it. It was written for two violins and an upright bass -- not exactly the world's most appealing audio combination. Even if I had suitable synthesizer replicas for those instruments, I'm not sure that would have made the most interesting album. So I just added a little Technicolor to it and let the music speak for itself.

Was *Francesco* the first thing you had done with the Synclavier?
No, the first thing I did with Synclavier is on *Thing-Fish*. Listen to the "Crabgrass Baby" track, which opens up Act II. The background vocals are a repeated vocal chant with this computer voice singing over it. The computer voice is done with a little card that fits into an IBM computer, and the stereo background vocals were our first attempt at stereo sampling using the mono system. The people from Synclavier are always accusing us here at the Utility Muffin Research Kitchen of taxing the system. But we've managed to do things that go beyond what was originally planned when the Synclavier was put together, because my musical needs and my desires are probably different from those of the other people who buy the thing. You wind up finding ways to hot-wire the machines to do what you want to do.

Since you're not primarily a keyboard player, what do you use the Synclavier keyboard for?
Well, I use it in a lot of different ways. I couldn't sit down and play anything that really resembles a piano part. However, if you understand how sounds can be assigned to the little black and white things in the Synclavier, you'll understand how I play on the keyboard. On patches for drum sets, for example, every key is actually a different drum set stereo sample. But you can make combinations of things occur. There's one line on *Jazz from Hell* that is somebody blowing into a bottle of beer to get this low noise, which is then slowed down even more and run simultaneously with a big bass drum. When those two sounds are hit together and split in stereo, it sounds kind of like a gong made out of wood that exudes dust after you hit it. You can get combinations of percussion noises that wouldn't happen in the real world unless the entire percussion section was unbelievably psychic and could count their butts off. You can make a whole bunch of guys hit a whole bunch of stuff all at the same time.

Is your technique good enough that you can play these rhythms pretty exactly on the keyboard as the piece is being recorded?
No. If I'm playing a funk track of something like that, I'll square it off. I'll use the resolution factor in the machine to square it off to the nearest sixteenth or 32nd or whatever. That keeps me honest. But there are advantages to playing it in. Usually drum parts have a lot of notes in them, and although you can add dynamics after the fact on the Synclavier, it's a real chore. So even if you have to wind up editing your drum track after you've done it, it's better to play it in. The other way to play it in is through the Octapads, because with that you can play rolls. One of the things that seems to be inconvenient to do on the Synclavier is to make their keyboard respond fast enough. Repeated notes are one of the harder things to do, whereas they're one of the most simple things to do on an Octapad. A simple roll will yield a whole string of pitches with different dynamics on each pitch. It gives you a much more textured drum part.

How else do you use the Synclavier keyboard?
Well, let's say you want to comp something. You want to have some sort of chordal aroma

going on. Even though I can't play a keyboard, I got rhythm. So by just doing punches with a patch that has pressure and velocity, you can stylize a sketch of where the chord ought to hit in order to accompany a part. You can hit all wrong notes, and then go back in and change the pitches. On *Jazz from Hell*, that's how a lot of the keyboard parts were entered.

Throughout your career you've experimented with combining rock and roll with, for want of a better term, serious instrumental music. And now it seems you're doing more totally instrumental albums. Are you moving away from weasely Fifties rock, or is that still very much part of your thought?
To tell you the truth, I still enjoy certain types of Fifties rock, but I hardly ever listen to it anymore because all I do is type. I feel that in a pure musical sense -- I mean, forget about whether anybody likes it, but in terms of pure musical experimentation -- there are answers to be obtained to serious musical questions with this machine, and as long as I'm thinking about 'em, I'm going to go in there and do that. But in a way, you put yourself in a box, because you're answering questions that the average guy never asks. I'm having a real good time with what I'm doing right now.

At what point would you be putting rock songs on an album, not because you cared about them, but because you were trying to sell albums? And would that be right or wrong?
It depends on whether you want to be a purist or whether you want to be practical. The fact of the matter is that if I do an album that has any kind of a vocal on it from now on, the chances are that vocal is going to be about a sociological or political topic. For example, I thought of one that I want to do just the other day called "Lie to Me," which would deal with a catalog of everything that the Reagan administration has been able to get away with for the last six years. That would be a worthwhile thing to stick in there. I'm not in the mood right now to generate a bunch of fun-time songs, and it seems like every time I do, all the music critics, who have absolutely no sense of humor, despise it so much that whatever else in the album is of a sturdier musical merit gets ignored, while these guys go on rampages about the text of my songs.

It's easy to focus on that stuff, particularly if it offends you.
Well, the thing is that a guy who writes usually is a word-oriented guy, and the chances of his knowing about music, especially if he's a rock music critic, are nil. None of the people who have reviewed my albums, with maybe two or three exceptions in the last 20 years, had a broad enough knowledge to know that what they were listening to was more outrageous, in terms of how it was flying in the face of music history, than any lyric or any individual story idea in the song could ever be. They weren't historically equipped to understand what the references were and to see why the music that was being done based on those references was either utterly hilarious or completely outrageous. You've got to know a certain amount of stuff in order to derive the maximum impact from those albums. That's just the way it works. I hate to be a guy sitting around saying, "I'm misunderstood," but it's not even a matter of being misunderstood. It's a matter of being uncomprehended.
But what do you expect? I do it because I like to do it, and if I write "Dinah Moe Humm," that's what I want to do, and it's done. That doesn't mean that every album's got to have "Dinah Moe Humm" or "Montana" [both from *Over-Nite Sensation*], and it also doesn't mean that every album has got to be with the London Symphony Orchestra. I have a lot of different musical questions, and I'm looking for a lot of different musical answers, and if the audience is similarly disposed, then they can take the course with me, because I'm learning stuff as I do these things.

That reminds me of something that one of the members of Kraftwerk once said -- that they were like scientists working in a musical laboratory, and when they found something true, they put it down on tape.
Well, I don't know whether I would go that far, because to say that it's true is pushing it. But the albums do in a way represent a catalog of the various experiments. Whether or not the experiment is successful or a failure, you be the judge yourself. But before you judge, you really should ask yourself whether you have enough data to make that judgment. For a guy who has never heard Anton Webern or Igor Stravinsky, or Edgard Varèse, or Takemitsu, or Ligeti, or Penderecki. . . . If you don't know what that stuff is, where it comes from, what it sounds like, and what the intention of it is, how can you even attempt to take a guess at what extrapolations you may be hearing? For example, in the song "Brown Shoes Don't Make It" [from *Absolutely Free*] most people hear only the words. They don't realize that there is, in the middle of that song, a completely academic and rigorous 12-tone string quartet going on in the background. The other thing that was funny about that song was that by playing "God Bless America," "Star-Spangled Banner," and one or two other patriotic songs at the end, all at the same time, I was making a musical joke about [Charles] Ives. So I've been doing this stuff for a long time, but the people who write about it are usually more interested in their bylines and the way they can diddle their words around. If they're in the word business, they concentrate on the words that I've written, and the results haven't been all that enthralling. But I think that this album and the next couple of albums are going to raise some eyebrows in different parts of the musical world. Even if you don't understand what it is that's going on, I think you have to appreciate that the sound quality of what's on there is truly exceptional.

Do you have any plans to take the Synclavier on the road?
If I ever go back out there, I'm definitely going to take the Synclavier.

Will you play it yourself?
Well, I'm not a keyboard player, remember. I would have an operator who sits at the Synclavier and, on cue, hits the start button to provide those parts of the orchestration which would be impossible to replicate onstage any other way, and to kind of edit back and forth between live musicians and the machine, where sometimes the machine is playing all by itself and sometimes the machine is playing the accompaniment and the soloist plays over it, or the machine is playing the whole orchestra part and the drummer and the bass keep going. Things like that. There are ways to do it.
It's a massively complicated rehearsal problem, in order to make it work invariably night after night. That's the main thing that concerns me about taking it out, because I know other people have had them out on the road, but I don't think anybody else has asked the machine to do what I want it to do, and to do it without fail in a hostile environment. When you take things on the road, they do break. Guys do drop them, and that's a big worry. If you build your show around the machine like that, and the machine doesn't work one day, you're going to have a lot of dissatisfied ticket holders out there. That's one of the great things about live music in its pure sense. If one guy gets sick, or you have some kind of mechanical problem, a creative band will find a way to make the show entertaining, and keep it going. If you have a very technologically oriented show, you have to carry spares. And the problem about carrying a spare Synclavier is it's a quarter of a million dollars.

The musicians you recruit are of such a high caliber that syncing with the Synclavier shouldn't be too much of a problem.
I've already done tests. My guys can sync with it, no problem. They latch right on there. But that was in a studio. You take it onto a stage, and you've got monitoring problems to deal with. What the drummer needs to hear is vastly different than what the keyboard

player or what the bass player would need to hear. So now you're into multiple monitor feeds. It's endless. It's a massive headache. And the solution to each headache is in increments of five figures.

Is this kind of trend going to become so major that it will curtail a lot of live performance by a lot of different musicians?
Take a look at what happens at a live performance now. When was the last time you went to see a band, and what you was a band? Basically, all of the big groups, so-called, are out there faking it with half the show on tape and people hopping around, kind of lip-syncing to the track. This is because people see acts on MTV and they go to a concert and they expect they're going to get the same result, and of course the only way to do it is to fake it.

A lot of that music may have been put together one track at a time, and the guys may in fact have trouble playing a solo with any sustained intensity for 32 bars at a stretch.
Well, it's not just the solo. It's the whole way the orchestration sounds. What you hear on television is very, very freeze-dried. The resemblance between the modern-day rock and roll record and what a band actually sounds like is . . . well, there is no comparison. I mean, kids have grown up to imagine that a drum set sounds only a certain way, and what they're hearing as a drum set probably isn't a drum set anyway. It's a machine. So if often comes as a shock when you find out what drums really sound like, and what a bass really sounds like, or what anything really sounds like, because they haven't been exposed to the real deal, which is not to say that they would even like the real thing or prefer it to what they get on MTV.
I think there's room for both things to exist, but the young person who is just starting to go to concerts in the '80s has already missed out on some of the most exciting live music that has ever happened in history, which is what's been going on for the last 15 or 20 years. There have been great live music events happening onstage that will only happen that one time, in one place, and it happened because guys were playing instruments, and they were really tearing it up that night. Those kinds of moments are getting fewer and further between, because of the economics of the touring business and because of the expectations of the audiences that have been raised by video music. People expect a different thing when they go to a concert. If you look the most wailing band in the world onto the stage and got up there and everybody played good, there would be a certain number of people in the audience that would go, "Yeah, but where's the drum machine? Where's the *boom-bap*?"
The other problem is that the audience who still likes live music of a daring sort, as they get older, they're less inclined to leave their homes and go to a hockey rink and have a 15-year-old person puking on their shoes. So the base of support for that other kind of music is mostly gone, and the younger ticket buyers don't know what that other kind of music is, so they don't go to it, and they don't request it. So what is being served up to them as music? Just take a look at what's happening in the world of guitars. It's people playing gymnastic doo-dads. Half of the things they're playing aren't even in the key of the song, you know? It's like, "Give me a scale I can play right here, and let me whiz up and down it a couple of times."

Maybe we could segue to another question of unusual Synclavier applications. On *The Mothers of Prevention* you use recorded excerpts from the Senate hearings about slapping warning stickers on rock albums with questionable lyrics. Were those excerpts sampled on the Synclavier?
Yes.

You've been very outspoken on issues related to efforts to ban controversial lyrics from rock albums. What concerns should musicians have on these subjects?
The first thing that they can do is to remember that art in the service of politics usually makes for boring art. The way that I think people should deal with this situation is to have some courage to resist the pressure of the record companies, because the record companies are more than delighted to sell out the First Amendment or any other historical document in order to increase their quarterly bottom line, usually at the expense of the rights of the artist. Let's face it, you're just a piece of meat when it comes to a record contract. And today, most record companies are not all that interested in building your career. They figure if they've got one album and they can make a bunch of bucks, they're delighted about it. Then they kiss you good-bye and pick up the next guy with a weird hairdo and some diagonal zippers on his body. You should fight that. People who are in the music business, when they do interviews, instead of plugging their next album or whatever, should actually have the courage to speak out about what they believe. A lot of them seem to have been given the word by their managers to keep their mouth shut.

Perhaps many musicians simply aren't concerned with political issues.
Well, I think it behooves them to have political thoughts, but let me make a definition clarification here. I say politics is the entertainment branch of industry, and government is what we need. We have a diverse population in the United States, with all kinds of different needs that have to be taken care of. That is the righteous function of government. Politics is bullshit, basically. Politics is involved with salesmanship. Government is involved with statesmanship. And I do make a distinction between those things. If you are making political statements, remember, you are not addressing the real needs of government. You're just talking about the Madison Avenue aspect. So think about that difference. Just a friendly reminder, in case somebody does decide to speak up.

My Guitar Wants to Kill Your Mama: Frank Zappa's Lethal Axe

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by James Rotondi

Frank Zappa's guitar solo's unravel like a good murder mystery. seemingly chaotic and elusive at any given point, they have a complex, frightening logic when taken as a whole. Zappa referred to his improvisations as "air sculpture," an instinctive process of molding the air molecules of the concert hall with the chisel edge of his artful axemanship. Like the tabla and sitar interplay in North Indian music, the dialogue between Frank and drummers like Vinnie Colaiuta, Chester Thompson, Chad Wackerman, and Terry Bozzio was polyrythmic, hypnotic, and dramatic. In long sets of tightly rehearsed material, Frank's solos were like clearings of dense thicket, an opportunity to improvise, to spit out the raw melodic ideas that he composed, edited work was built on. Through unusual rhythmic patterns, odd tonalities, searing tones, and heaps of attitude, Zappa the guitarist created a body of work that rivals his compositional legacy. In fact, the tow are inseparable.

It's easy to point to great moments. There's the nasty baked blues of "Willie the Pimp" from 1969's *Hot Rats,* the snaking fuzztone of "Transylvania Boogie" from 1970's *Chunga's Revenge,* the hammer-on frenzy of 'Inca Roads" from 1975's *One Size Fits All*, the wistful chords of the title track from 1976's *Zoot Allures*, or the soaring "Watermelon in Easter Hay" from 1979's *Joe's Garage*. Every guitarist should experience the sentimental pearl notes of "Pink Napkins" or the quasi-Arab warbling of "Canarsie" from the landmark three-CD *Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar* set. And if you haven't heard the bruising alien-blues workout of "For Duane" from the 2-CD instrumental set *Frank Zappa: Guitar*, hold on to your muffin. But a random sampling barely scratches the surface. As his son Dweezil puts it, "There's such a mass quantity of stuff. Who else tried so many things?"

It's been almost two years since Zappa's untimely passing from prostate cancer at the age of 52. With Rykodisc's monster release of almost 60 Zappa titles already on the streets, and a new collection of alternate versions of Frank's most revered guitar instrumentals in the works, we can now assess and appreciate his work as a whole. Books have been written on Zappa's sociological, political, and compositional significance, and his controversial humor and satire alone deserve some kind of journalistic appraisal. But his innovative guitar playing is topic enough for these pages. His style could almost be cruel in its defiant, aggressive edginess, or it could express a sweet, sensitive side that his lyrics and persona rarely betrayed. "He was as diverse a jewel as you can possibly find," says Steve Vai, who played with Frank from '80 and '82, "and that's why his music is going to live. It's an endless wealth of entertainment and inspiration, and it's quite a treasure for the guitar player who discovers it."

I Come From Nowhere

Zappa began playing at age 18, inspired by the primal, late-'50s blues guitar of Johnny "Guitar" Watson, Guitar Slim, and Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown. Watson's "Three Hours

Past Midnight" was one of Frank's favorite solo's, as was Slim's "The Story of My Life." "Stylistically, my approach is closest to Guitar Slim," he said in *The Real Frank Zappa Book*[Simon & Schuster, 1990]."His *mangle-it-strangle-it* attitude provided an important aesthetic guidepost for the style I eventually developed." But Zappa's ears were also attuned to modern classical composers like Stravinsky, Bartok, and Webern, and he had a taste for doo-wop and Eastern music. So perhaps it's no wonder that as he developed his own guitar voice, Zappa was neither jazzman, art-rocker, blues purist, avant-garde skronkmeister, fusion boy, or metal maven, though he enjoyed and was enjoyed by players from all those schools.

"I think of him as a genre unto himself," says Mike Keneally, who played with Zappa's '88 touring ensemble. "I don't see him as part of a chain, like Chuck Berry to Keith Richards to Frank to Jan Akkerman or something. There area number of guitar players who have owned up to his influence, and I think it's possible that the freakier strain of experimental European music, as exemplified by somebody like Fred Frith, might not have been quite the same were it not for Frank. But when I listen to what's happening with guitar playing nowadays, it's almost as if Frank had no influence at all. The more skewed aspects of what he was doing were so unique to him that they just sailed right over people's heads."

Even Frank's fans didn't always get it. Clamoring for "Dinah Moe-Humm" and "Titties & Beer," they were likely to be disappointed by a sudden eight-minute solo of *E* Lydian septuplets. "Sure," Keneally responds, "you can feel the energy of a certain part of the audience drop whenever somebody handed Frank his guitar. But there were other people where that was when their interest really peaked. Some people could get into the extended soloing and some people couldn't." Warren Cuccurullo could. "Frank had a guitar voice as strong as Hendrix',but no one really caught on," says the guitarist who joined Zappa's band in 1978, went on to form Missing Persons with ex-Zappa drummer Terry Bozzio, and is now a member of Duran Duran. Around '73, Cuccurullo was turned on to *Over-Nite Sensation* by a friend: "I was drawn in by the overall sound-the marimbas, trombones, the backing vocalists. But the guitar solos on that album totally fucked me up. I mean, 'Montana'?! People were always talking about McLaughlin and Holdsworth, and I said, 'No, no. *This* is the guy.' Frank's style was blues-based but not blues-bound. It was Ravi Shankar meets the blues by way of Venus. He's one of the truly unique guitar voices."

Steve Vai first heard Zappa on *Bongo Fury*'s relentlessly smoking "Muffin Man." "My jaw hit the floor, " Vai recalls. "He was playing so fast, and it was wild and had real aggression to it. He was a fabulous guitar player. But Frank didn't set out to become a guitar hero. He used the instrument as a compositional tool." Keneally stresses that Zappa's greatest strength as a soloist was his ideas. "he always had that going full-bore, even if he hadn't picked up the guitar in a while and his technique wasn't up to what it could be. He was full of music at all times. He didn't have and fondness for technique at the expense of ideas or regurgitating learned licks that you knew would get an audience off." Cuccurullo also stresses that whether Zappa held a guitar or pen, his ideas, not his skill, were paramount. "When he wrote on keyboards, it was the same ideas. He did some amazing stuff with whammy, effects, and feedback, but his guitar voice was unique because he was a unique composer. That's what came out in his solos. A lot of people play stock guitaristic things, and they may be technically great, but they're not unique like that."

In a 1984 interview with a British fanzine, Zappa was asked whether he felt underrated as a guitarist. "I think I *shouldn't* be rated as a guitarist!" he shot back. "Rating guitarists is a stupid hobby. I'm a composer, and my instrument is the guitar. If you like the

composition, fine. My technique as a guitar player is fair. There are plenty of people who play faster than I do, never hit a wrong note, and have a lovely sound. If you want to rate guitar players, go for *them*. But there isn't anybody else who'll take the chances that I will take with a composition onstage in front of an audience, and just go out there and have the nerve, the ultimate audacity to say, 'Okay, I don't know what I'm going to play, and you don't know what I'm going to play, and that makes us equal. So let's go-we'll have an adventure here.' That's what I do. There's no way to rate that. You either like that kind of entertainment or you don't. I'd rather have the ups and downs than the assuredness that I was going to go out there and amaze everybody with technique. I want to hear some *music*, and the challenge for me is writing an instant composition while I'm playing. That's what I do. I Must say, in all fairness, that without being rated, I know there are people out there who *love* what I do on guitar."

Friendly Little Fingers

Zappa's technique was as eccentric as any of his absurdist utterances. "Franks right hand looked like a chicken head pecking out the notes," says Dweezil. "He had the weirdest technique ever, and it's real hard to describe in words. You have to see it to understand all the little quirks." Keneally recommends the concert films Does Humor Belong In Music? and Baby Snakes as good places to study Frank's idiosyncratic hand moves. "The way he pinched the pick is sort of peculiar," he comments. "In the 'Zoot Allures' solo there are some nice close-ups of his picking hand. He was holding the pick flush against the meat of both his thumb and his forefinger as though he was picking out whiskers—pluck, pluck, pluck. It's a neat-looking technique, and it makes the sound pop out. It's an aggressive, very masculine sound, for want of a better term. Every note has a lot of power."

"Once you see it and try it, you can see how those sounds came out," Dweezil says. "He's got a similar style to Eric Johnson—the thumb and first finger move the pick and change the sounds texture, as opposed to the wrist." As seen on the cover *of Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar,* Frank often anchored his hand by placing his ring finger and pinky on the pickguard just under the neck, so a lot of his picking took place between the end of the neck and the bridge pickup. "When he had his hand anchored there," notes Dweezil, "you hear a slight harmonic when he chugs the low notes, which you wouldn't get with the traditional technique where your right hand is muting at the bridge." Frank dug into the strings, using upstrokes and downstrokes in odd combinations, picking in circles, and frequently scraping the pick across the strings to create gurgling clusters of notes. "He would slur his right hand across the fretboard upwards towards the lowest strings as he fretted notes," recalls Cuccurullo. Frank told GP, "If I pick one note with my right hand, I'm playing five with my left." The scraping technique, Keneally posits, was one way of grabbing a bunch of notes in rapid succession. "If you're scraping your pickup the strings and doing a lot of stuff with your left hand, then it's kind of like sampling," he explains. "There's this big reservoir of notes, and you're just grabbing a handful of them and throwing them out. It wasn't exactly sweep-picking, but he was certainly sweeping the strings."

A predecessor to Van Halen's right-hand tapping technique was Frank's "Bulgarian bagpipe" picking maneuver, in which he hammered on the fretboard with the side of his pick while fretting notes with his left hand. The technique—which Zappa claimed to have learned in 1972 from drummer Jim Gordon—can be heard on the end of the solos in "Inca

Roads" (an all-time favorite of many guitarists) and *"Po*-Jama People" from *One Size Fits All,* as well as "Variations On The Carlos Santana Secret Chord Progression" and "Gee, I Like Your Pants" from the *Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar* albums. According to Dweezil, Frank used small Gibson heavy jazz picks in the early '70s and Fender medium later in the decade before switching to steel picks in the '80s after Dweezil introduced him to Warren DiMartini, who'd been using them with Ratt. But though Frank could certainly play fast with a pick, Dweezil explains that he could attain serious velocity with his fingers as well: "He had a technique that he mainly used for chords. He used the middle finger of his right hand to strum the strings, and he could do it so incredibly fast It's almost like a *rasgueado* in flamenco, but it I only one finger." At other times, Frank would produce odd overtones by striking and lightly scraping the low strings with his thumbnail. Zappa's hammer-and-pull technique was highly, if distinctively, developed, and he used open strings in interesting ways. Keneally points to a characteristic riff from "Sheik Yerbouti Tango": "It uses open strings, and it's very whole toneish—a classic Zappa riff." Dweezil explains that the whole-tone lick is accomplished by hammering and pulling on the fourth and sixth frets of the G and *A* strings in rapid succession. Even played on acoustic, the intervals scream Zappa.

A common criticism of Frank's technique is that he tended to be sloppy, at least in comparison to the hyper-precision of the G.I.T. generation. Keneally deflates the argument: "That's an irrelevant topic. Total uniformity attack, making sure every note is fretted and picked at the same time—that *sound* had no interest to him. If you listen to any section of a solo where it sounds somewhat chaotic, there's still never any sense that he was out of control. Frank was one of the most awesomely in-control guitar players that ever walked the earth. He isn't playing learned licks, but attempting to invent something, playing within the outer realms of his knowledge of the guitar, and doing that in front of thousands of people. That fearlessness is one of the more noble and ballsy things about him as a guitar player. If that encompassed slop every once in a while, that just meant he was trying something that he hadn't tried before. That's honorable."

Harmonic Aromas

The harmonic and rhythmic substance Zappa's solos is every bit as unique as his physical technique. In 1977, he told *GP* writer Steve Rosen that his solos are "speech-influenced rhythmically." And harmonically they're either pentatonic or poly-scale oriented. And there's the Mixolydian mode, which I use a lot." Steve Vai acknowledges Frank's liberal use of Mixolydian and remembers that Frank would often simply shift the familiar pentatonic blues scale form to different places on the neck in order to play a different "mode." "But he'd also go off into atonal stuff, altered scales, whole-tone scales, even Hungarian minor," Vai relates. "He could tap into all those things." Keneally points out that, despite his knowledge of scales and modes, Frank rarely let prescribed harmonic parameters limit him. "I don't think he thought in terms of scales as much as melodies, and I doubt that he ever thought modally. He might have started out knowing that stuff, but I think that the tonalities that he favored became such a part of him over the course of time that he didn't have to specifically employ modes. It was intuitive."

Besides sheer confidence, Zappa's adventurousness relied on the very intentional harmonic flexibility of his backing vamps. As he told *GP,* "I don't like chord changes. I like to have one tonal center that stays there, or possibly with a second chord that varies off the main tonal center, and then I play around that." Zappa compared his approach to Indian music, in which chordal movement can be implied by the juxtaposition of various

melodic lines, despite the lack of conventional chord changes. "That's the way I like to work," said Zappa. "There's a little four-note vamp in Treacherous Cretins' (on *Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar)* that implies *D* minor and *A* chords. It creates a harmonic climate. I don't think of them as chord changes. Instead, I look at the whole as a harmonic *attitude* that sets up a mood, and I just play inside of that attitude."

"The cool thing about the way he set up all his solos was that he had a wide-open landscape," says Dweezil. "He wasn't competing with the standard accompaniment that most rock guitar players find themselves soloing over." Keneally remembers only rarely playing fully voiced chords behind Frank. "Usually it was just two notes, or a single-note ostinato repeated over and over. There were other times where you might play a repeated part, but as things developed you'd do variations on the theme that were related to the original composed figure. So you were varying it to a certain degree, but ultimately you didn't want to get in Frank's way, because he was playing around with the outer limits of the harmonic content so much that if you got too adventurous harmonically, the chances of stepping on what he was doing were real good."

Zappa loved flatted seconds, diminished fifths, flat ninths—ingredients that Vinnie Colaiuta described as "putting some garlic in your playing." As Frank explained to Matt Resnicoff in a 1991 *Musician* interview, "If your ear hears a harmonic foundation of something, then the interest of the solo is the theoretical difference you perceive on a note-by-note, nanosecond-by-nanosecond basis of what the improviser inflicts on the established tonality. In other words, if you *hear* in the bass a C and a G, you know, 'You're in the key of C buddy.' When the soloist comes along and plays the *C#,* he's sending you a *message.* And where that Q goes is part of the adventure of playing a solo. They're like ingredients in a stew. I mean, there's a right way and a wrong way to stick a C# on top of a C-G ground base. If you play all notes that are part of the C major scale, the recipe you have just prepared is oatmeal, know what I mean? So it's like the difference between eating oatmeal and eating salsa."

Zappa facetiously described the basic harmonic climates—he also called them "harmonic aromas"—to a British fanzine in 1984. If it's an augmented chord, it's a *mysterious* climate. If it's a diminished chord, its a little *tenser.* If it's minor, it's *serious.* If it's major, it's *happy,* I fits major 7th, *you're falling in love.* If it's augmented 11th, it's *bebop."*

Murder By Numbers

Zappa's rhythms were as spicy and intuitive as his melodies. Even more complex than his asymmetrical time signatures was his phrasing within those meters, as Steve Vai, who transcribed Frank's solos in *The Frank Zappa Guitar Book,* can attest, "Frank had a unique sense of time," says Vai. "He'd often get lost in the meter, but his sense of timing was pretty impeccable. He wouldn't rush, he wouldn't drag, but his sense of phrasing was from Venus. It was like Mongolian jazz or something. Jazz guys will play a phrase by playing eighth-notes over a 4/4. end it on one, and go, 'How'd you like that?' Frank would take a phrase of seven and put it on top of eleven and always know where the pulse was."

In one 1983 installment of the *GP* column he titled "Non-Foods," Frank insisted that "any piece of time can be subdivided any old way you like. And that's what happens when people talk, because people don't talk in 4/4 or 3/4 or 2/4— they talk all over the place.

And if the rhythm of what you play follows along with the natural scan of human speech, it's going to have a different feel to it." In the same way that he explained the "message" implied by playing a *C#* against a C major tonality, he saw the juxtaposition of rhythmic textures as crucial for creating musical interest. "If one guy is playing exactly the 4/4 of the bar and another guy is playing nine beats against that, you're going to get another rhythm. That's the difference tone, the *mystery note.* There's a clock inside your body that's saying, 'We're in 4/4.' So when somebody plays nine across it, inside your body you heal the difference, and that's part of the excitement of that kind of rhythm."

Zappa's solos arc loaded with odd-numbered note groupings. "He liked fives, sevens, elevens," notes Keneally. "I'm talking about imposing these groupings over what might be a steady pulse of maybe 3/4 or 4/4 and either playing fast little phrases or maybe long, stretched-out ones, like playing a long, steady eleven-tuplet over two bars of 3/4. On first listening it sounds like he's just doing something that's rubbing up against the basic pulse. It doesn't sound calculated. When he was writing music on paper, composing all those quintuplets or odd meters, that was calculated and done for effect. But when he was soloing, it was very intuitive and not done to be clever. That's just the way he felt stuff, the way his heart would beat. It was just the fabric of his musical soul."

In his GP columns, Zappa singled out drummer Vinnie Colaiuta as a prime agent in his own ability to exploit odd rhythms. "The style that I played on the *Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar* albums was very heavily influenced by the fact that Vinnie Colaiuta is the drummer. You can rely on him—you know that he knows where he is and knows where he's going and will come back. He's not just piddling around out there. And unless you're playing with a drummer who understands that type of rhythm and can stretch it to the maxi, then you're not going to get the same effect. Its not just a matter of ignoring the downbeat, It's purposely and consciously going for things other than a downbeat. And 1m playing a totally different way now that I have another drummer [Chad Wackerman) in the band."

"Its hard for me to explain to guys just coming into the band the rhythmic concept I have about playing," Zappa told Rosen, "because it's based on ideas of metrical balance—long sustained events versus grupettos that are happening with a lot of notes on one beat, like a lot of sextuplets, septuplets, and things like that. 11 play 13 notes over a half-note and try to space it evenly so it flows. This is sort of against the grain of rock and roll, which likes to have everything in exactly duple or triple, straight up and down, so you can constantly tap your foot to it. The hardest thing for me to do is play straight up and down. Stuff that everybody else does naturally just seems as impossible as shit to me. I don't think in little groups of twos and fours— they just don't come out that way. I can sit around and play fives and sevens all day long with no sweat, but the minute I've got to go *do*-do-do-do, *do*-do-do-do, it feels weird, like wearing tight shoes."

The Icepick in The Forehead

"For guitarists, and electric guitarists especially, tone is so important," Zappa told writer Ben Watson in *Frank Zappa: The Negative Dialectics Of Poodle Play* [St. Martin's Press, 1994). "If you can get the right tone, you know your solo is going to go great, whatever the notes. It's something spiritual, to do with the way the fingers respond to what the ear is hearing, a continual refinement and adjustment."

Though many guitarists still associate Frank with a nasty, heavily saturated, midrangey honk, he produced a galaxy of sounds, from the crystal droplets of "Pink Napkins" and "Twenty Small Cigars" to the bludgeoning howl of "Advance Romance" and "Variations On The Carlos Santana Secret Chord Progression," all bespeaking fierce attitude and emotional commitment. In keeping with his original inspirations—Guitar Slim and Johnny "Guitar" Watson, whose tone he once described as an "icepick in the forehead"—Zappa liked his tone loud, abrasive, *and* raw. His guitar techs—among them David Robb, Midget Sloatman, and Meri Saunders, Jr.—all attest to Frank's spot-on ears and no-bull approach to attaining the sounds he wanted.

"It was very precise and scientific," says Sloatman, who did extensive modifications on Frank's guitars. "I was a screwdriver in Frank's hands. It was, 1 want to hear this, this, and this. Now subtract that. add more of this, take this pickup and swap that pickup with this one.' Eventually it evolved into what he'd wanted to hear in the first place. See, if Frank's rig wasn't delivering the sound that he expected. he wouldn't play. He wasn't kidding, and he wasn't being a prima donna."

Zappa's first guitar was an archtop his brother Bobby bought at an auction for $1.50. For the first three Mothers Of Invention al-bums Zappa played a Gibson ES-5 Switch-master. He later acquired a Gibson SG, which he liked because of its light weight and thin neck. In the '70s and '80s he used a variety of instruments: two Fender Stratocasters with Performance necks, DiMarzio or Seymour Duncan pickups, and Floyd Rose tremolos; a '70s Gibson Les Paul Custom: a Fender Stratocaster once owned and burned by Jimi Hendrix (in Miami, not Monterey) with a Performance neck sized to the specs of Frank's SG, an acoustic Black Widow with EMG pickups, and several others. In the early '80s he experimented with a D'Mini Les Paule and Strate. Zappa liked very low action. "Frank wanted the least amount of resistance," says Sloatman. "He actually played very delicately." Frank preferred .008s or .009s for the high -*E* string.

Working with Franks discerning ears, Sloatman developed an onboard preamp/EQ system that was eventually installed in nearly every guitar Frank played. "They were identical parametric filter circuits," explains Sloatman. "One of the filters was set for the bass frequencies from about 5oHz to 2kHz, and the other one was set for the top end, from about 500Hz up to 20kHz." The filters had a variable resonant frequency ("q") independent from the EQ gain. "You could find a tone and get right on top of it, tweak it. and nail it," says Sloatman. The Q ranged from .7 to 10, or a very wide dynamic range to a very narrow one, and was adjustable via a 1/4" screwdriver notch on the face of the guitar. This allowed Frank to control his feedback characteristics in any hall. He could basically tune his guitar to the room, find out how the room responded to the amplifier, and dial it up so he could have maximum control of the feedback. That was the whole point behind the equalizers. But Frank also played a lot with his left hand, and in order to hear the nuances—the string presence—he'd have to bring the treble up, which is another thing he liked about the filters. He could pick high frequencies anywhere from 4k to 8k and bring out the nuances of the strings, so you could hear what his fingers were doing, even if he wasn't picking every note."

The Seymour Duncan humbuckers in Frank's Les Paul could be switched between single-coil, humbucking, or single-coil out-of-phase settings, and a toggle switch controlled whether the pickups were wired in series or parallel. A 9-position wafer switch afforded all the possible combinations. The Les Paul and the Hendrix Strat also housed a Dan Armstrong-designed Green Ringer, which, explains Sloatman, "is a low-pass filter into a DC rectifier circuit. Because it's trying to convert AC to steady DC, it produces an

abundance of a second harmonic. It kind of feels like it's feeding back, because you play a note and instantly hear the octave. But any time you play more than one note, it does this horrible modulation stuff, which Frank loved."

Zappa admitted to being "real fussy about equalization." and he used his wah-wah pedal more as an equalizer than a dynamic device. "Very seldom do I just step on it on the heat like on the old Clapton records where he goes *wacka-wacka-wacka,"* he told Rosen. "Usually what I do is shape the notes for phrasing with it, and the motion of the pedal itself is very slight. I try to find one center notch that's going to emphasize certain harmonics, and ride it right in that area. As a matter of fact, I think I was one of the first people to use wah-wah. I'd never even heard of Jimi Hendrix at the time I bought mine. I had used wah-wah on the clavinet, guitar, and saxophone when we were doing *We're Only In It For The Money in '67,* and that was just before I met Hendrix."

Frank produced gorgeous tones with the Mu-tron Bi-Phase and Octave Divider, as well as a voltage control filter (VCF) circuit from an old Oberheim keyboard, which provides the insanely funky sample-and-hold percolation effect heard on "Ship Ahoy" from *Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar Some More.* In 77 he touted an "attractive little device" he called the Electro Wagnerian Emancipator, which he claimed combined a "frequency follower with a device that puts out harmony notes to what you're playing. You can have your choice of any 12 chromatic notes in four parts following your runs. You can't play chords with it, but linearly it'll follow you whether you bend or whatever. Its main drawback is that the tone that comes out of it is somewhat like a Farfisa organ." On later tours, Frank's rack boasted a pair of MXR digital delays, a Roland GP-8 processor, an Electro Harmonix Big Muff, two Oberheim VCF cards, and a Mu-tron Bi-Phase. He'd also incorporate the Synclavier into his stage sound, controlling it via a Roland synthesizer pickup. The only devices Zappa kept footside were a Rat distortion box and his CryBaby (which were sent through a Hush IIB noise reduction unit) and a 12-button stereo relay switcher, designed by David Robb, which directed Frank's signal to one of three or four amp setups and brought effects in and out as desired.

On the Mothers' debut album, *Freak Out!,* Frank used a Fender Deluxe amp. For '70s al bums like *Over-Nite Sensation, Apostrophe,* and *Zoot Allures,* he generally relied on a simple Pig-nose for studio work, switching to Marshall 100-watt heads and Orange amps for tours. On the 1988 tour, according to Meri Saunders, Jr., Frank used a combination of Marshall, Carvin, Seymour Duncan, and Acoustic 100-watt heads in stereo and mono configurations. All the amps had paralleled, hot-rodded inputs doubled into the bass channel, and each setup had a characteristic tone that Frank could blend in or isolate at will using his relay switcher. For a nasty tone, a single Marshall JCM 800 drove two 1x12 cabs with EVs. The wet signal from the VCF, flangers, and Mu-tron Bi-Phase drove a pair of Marshalls into two open-back 4x12 cabs with Celestion speakers. The clean signal from the Roland GP-8 was fed from two Carvins into 4x12 Marshall cabs. Another wet signal from the GP-8 and the MXR DDLs was sent to a pair Acoustic amps into two closed-back 1x12 EV cabs. All the speakers were kept under the band riser pointing towards the rear of the stage, miked with Sennheiser 421s—and it was *loud.* When Frank tore into one of his solos, Saunders says, it "felt like the stage was taking off." Vai describes Zappa's 1981 sound as "Godzilla meets Mothra. It was devastatingly loud, heavy, and feedbacky." Frank stayed mobile in concert with Nady 700 series wireless systems.

Tuning was critical during a Zappa tour. as the finer solos would be taken from the live tapes and flown into new sonic settings on studio recordings, a process he called "xenocrony." solos like the ones in "Inca Roads" and "Fembot In A Wet T-Shirt" were

captured this way. In the studio, the raw guitar signal would be processed yet again. For the guitar sound on "Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar," Dweezil says Frank tweaked the original track with two MicMix Dynaflangers flanging in opposite directions across the stereo spectrum. As Frank told *GP's* Tom Mulhern in '83, the Dynaflangers could be set to follow the envelope of the high-frequency decay, rather than the amplitude envelope" for what he called a "pillowy effect." "It just sounds thick as hell," Dweezil raves. "You can also hear it on stuff like 'Beat It With Your Fist' and 'Variations On The Carlos Santana Secret Chord Progression.' "

Zappa's live recordings usually included a track of direct guitar, and Vai recalls that in the studio Frank would "take the direct track and send it out to different amplifiers. Then he'd pan those signals with all these odd sounds left and right. You'll hear, for instance, a really clean, flanged guitar on one side, on the other side a Pignose, and in the middle a gargantuan delayed Marshall, all with different reverbs. That's all experimentation after the fact."

"There's an insane progression of tones from tour to tour, from album to album," says Keneally. "Guitar magazines tend to point to that midrange honk, and the goose tone *is* something that comes up every once in a while, but that's just part of it. In '88 his tone was scary clean and massive. I had some good times just standing there on stage being *bathed* in his solos." For Frank, tone wasn't simply a matter of amps and effects. After his first show with Zappa in 1980, Steve Vai asked Frank for an honest appraisal of his first night with the group. "He said, 'Your playing is really great, but your tone sounds like an *electric ham sandwich.' "* laughs Vai. "He told me, 'You have to realize that the tone is in your head.'"

In 1977, Zappa told *Guitar Player* why he championed the raucous guitar solos of Johnny "Guitar" Watson, Guitar Slim, Gatemouth Brown, B.B. King, and other blues players, in words that handily describe his own fretboard explorations. "For my taste," he said, "these solos are exemplary because what is being played seems honest and, in a musical way, a direct extension of the personality of the men who played them." Now shut up 'n play yer guitar.

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http://members.shaw.ca/mitb/ocker/

THE DAVID OCKER INTERNET INTERVIEW

e-interview performed 1994 and 1995 via email and the FZ online newsgroup (alt.fan.frank-zappa)

PREFACE BY BILL LANTZ

PREFACE BY DAVID OCKER

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ORCHESTRA MUSIC

ZAPPA AND OTHER COMPOSERS

SYNCLAVIER

FRANK ZAPPA - THE PERSON

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COMPOSITION & MUSIC THEORY

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WHILE YOU WERE ART

MISCELLANEOUS

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- **Who was Fulcanelli?**
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- **Zappa Family Pets**
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PREFACE BY BILL LANTZ

Many thanks to David Ocker for his unbending patience and kindness throughout this almost 9 month process. Also many thanks to the contributors of alt.fan.frank-zappa on the internet. A partial list is included but if you read this and recognize your question to David, I'd be happy to add your name to the list of contributors.

And speaking of contributors, Art Jarvinen has recently (8/98) lent his insight into this page in Zappa history with his thoughts on many of the most interesting parts of this interview. Art worked along side David and is probably best known in Zappa's circles as the "Art" in

"While You Were Art" from the Jazz From Hell LP. He also was a copyist for Frank. I've attempted to cross link his comments into a separate browser window. Any time you see a button bar with **Art's Comments**, click it and you'll get Art's great insight and opinions on whatever the current subject in the interview is. THANKS ART! Please visit Art's website too! (his Mixed Meter blog!)
I found this to be a very educational and at times technical account of David's time with Frank and much more. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did putting it together. Thanks again David.

PREFACE BY DAVID OCKER (docker@netcom.com)
Why, gee, you're welcome, Bill. Okay - first of all, I know you're all asking "who is this guy, anyway?" I was hired by Frank in June of 1977 and worked for him nearly continuously till the Autumn of 1984. I had studied clarinet and composition in college and had a strong interest in contemporary music. Frank needed someone who could copy, edit and otherwise manipulate his difficult written music - which was laying in piles all around his studio the first day I met him. Over those 7 years I produced a large number of scores and performance parts of his music, many of which are available now from Barfko-Swill.
Later, I introduced Frank to my abilities as a clarinetist. He used me on a few albums - and wrote a grandly difficult clarinet part into "Mo 'n Herb's Vacation" for me. The high point of my time with Frank was performing that work with the LSO. For my last year with him I became a synclavier operator (it was just out at the time) and I have a few more album credits in that capacity.
==
affz -->>
P.S. Is your organization really called "Computer Headaches"? ouch!
==
DO -->>
It's a joke - since I left Frank's employ I work at home alone doing music engraving on the computer. I'm a musician seduced into computer system maintenance - because there's no one else around to keep this beast running.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

David Ocker - **DO -->>**
Art Jarvinen – ***AJ***
John Steinmetz - **JS -->>**
Bill Lantz - **BL -->>**
alt.fan.frank-zappa - usenet questions and personal email to David Ocker - **affz -->>**
(here is a partial listing of people who took part - please forgive omissions)

Steven J. Monroe	Peter Mulderry	Nicolas Bertrand
Ben Miller	CarlEdward	James Cheng Ting Fei Brian Zavitz
Bill Flynn	Jeff Rocca	
Keith Roberts	Pat Buzby	Paul Psutka
Stephen Simms	John Henley	Dave Ousley
Paul Woodiel	Stan Ivester	Gregory J. Sandell
funt@utxvms.cc.utexas.edu	Joe Newman	Onno.Gross
Todd Poynor	John Scialli	Raymond D Ricker
glatter@delphi.com	Michael Packer	Francesco Gentile

INTRODUCTION

BL -->>
I accidently got the ball rolling by confusing Richard Emmet's photo in the Society Pages issue with David Ocker....and after apologizing and pleading ignorance..
DO -->>
's okay. Richard never got much publicity. I'd love to read what he said, however, since we worked on lots of the same projects. We went to Cal Arts together - I got him his job with Frank - and we lived within 5 blocks of each other in LA.
BL -->>
Now that I've firmly inserted my foot in my mouth, would you be interested in doing an interview at some time for Society Pages?
DO -->>
Fine. Do you pay my expenses for a week at a resort spa while some team of interviewers debriefs me? 8-) Or can we do this over the net?
BL -->>
The net would be ideal. Are you aware of Society Pages (besides in theory)?
DO -->>
Yes, I did know of the Society Pages. A person named Marc Z. (ed. Ziegenhagen) contacted me 3 or 4 years ago and maybe even sent me a copy of one issue. It's filed away somewhere.
BL -->>
In the finest Society Pages tradition what are your kids names and why did you name them that?, etc.
DO -->>
No kids - just one wife (Leslie who studies marine worms) and our four cats - named Batty (because she drives us batty sometimes), Big Boy (because of his size and gender), Riot (because we found her after the LA Riots) and O.J. (also known as Orange Jack who is NOT named after the more notorious humanoid). Happy?
BL -->>
The issue of Society Pages that has the interview with Richard Emmet is #9 and came out in May of 1992. Richard supplied some photos of you, FZ, John Steinmetz and him fiddling about with some instruments (guitar and wind instruments). (see Richard's website for more photos)
DO -->>
You know that was the only session where I got any pictures of me together with Frank - unfortunately I don't look like that anymore. Actually -it's fortunate that I don't look like that. (I'm thinner and clean shaven)
==
DO -->>
(a few days later) Thanks for the off-print from the Society Pages with Richard's interview. I haven't seen or heard from him since he moved to Oregon. Sometimes I envy him being out of the L.A. rat-race. Other times I really enjoy the L.A. rat race. (I guess that makes me a rat.) There was a discussion of a piece called C INSTRUMENTS. That was a guitar solo that Steve Vai had transcribed and Frank gave it to me to make a copy for people (including myself) to play - so I had to make two versions: one in the key of C (for everyone else) and one in Bb for me. Usually there are three bits of information on the top of a piece of music a) the intended instruments - in this case "C Instruments" or "Bb" since lots of different instruments would be attempting it, b) the title - there was none so this was blank, and c) the composer - F.Z. When the music got passed around no one knew what to call it - and they mistook "C Instruments" for the title.
In effect for a short period of time I had named this piece. Later, reason prevailed, and Frank made it part of Sinister Footwear.

AJ
TOPIC*: C INSTRUMENTS*
I still have my copy. I got it from David, I'm sure. The Antenna Repairmen did a concert at The House in Santa Monica on November 30, 1981, on which we played it. Bob and I did the melody on marimba and vibes, and M.B. Gordy made up a drum set part. I had asked Frank if it was okay that we perform the piece and he said yes, but wanted to know how we were approaching it. At that time everyone was playing the black page, and there were other works of that ilk going around - Manx Needs Women was one - but usually only the melody parts. Frank said that "all those polyrhythms don't mean anything unless they're in reference to something". So he suggested we use a drum machine or drum set, to give the melodic line rhythmic meaning. So that's what we did. Melody and drums, no bass line. I do have a copy of the bass part, but we never used it. Maybe I didn't have that at the time. Frank was still working on Sinister Footwear. It was obvious that the piece was not called "C Instruments", so I asked Frank what we should list as the title. He said "The Melody from Sinister Footwear". It eventually became a big part of the first movement, but with a lot of changes. Mostly, easy stuff became easier - elongated. All the really hard shit (the tuplets over bars of 5 or nine) stayed in. So, The Antenna Repairmen actually premiered part of Sinister Footwear in a working version. Frank of course, was not there. David probably was though.

==(John Steinmetz enters discussion on SP#9 photos:)
JS to **DO -->>**
I remember that time at Zappa's. It was, I believe, the first of two times I was there. I can't remember why we went, or why we had our instruments. The photographer was doing some shots of Frank--I can almost remember the photographer's name, because he later took pictures of the L.A. Chamber Orchestra for a wonderful brochure with individual shots of orchestra members in tails but in fun positions or with props. I forgot that Richard Emmet was there.
Anyway, Frank invited us over to the piano, with the photographer in tow, and showed us the transcription of the "The Dangerous Kitchen" that he had just received from the transcriber, and started playing it. We joined in, and I remember that Frank was impressed that we could sightread the stuff. I don't know if he told us that at the time or if he told you later. Anyway, it was a fun, weird sort of jam session.
The second visit was when you recorded the 4 clarinet parts and I recorded the 4 bassoon parts of Mo 'n Herb's Vacation.
DO -->>
(The photographer was John Livzey.) I do remember that he took some very excellent shots of me that day. The transcriber John refers to was, of course, Steve Vai.

THE LSO SESSIONS

affz -->> re: London Symphony Orchestra sessions from 1983:
I am amazed to hear the details of the drinking that went on in the recordings and at the concerts. Someone close my jaw! Is this is a cultural characteristic of British orchestras or something? I'm appalled. In all my experience as a symphonic,studio and theater musician in New York, I have never encountered any examples of open social drug consumption of any kind in working situations. And provided by management, no less!
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DO -->>
I never saw anyone drink during rehearsal or concert, only before and after (and intermissions). I saw a back-stage bar in use before a concert at the Queen Elizabeth Hall as well as the Barbican so I concluded that must be a common thing. I suspect, however, that this is a cultural difference between Britain and the US, not something limited to orchestra life. I also remember being amazed that casual beer drinking was visible on television - like a talkshow host and guest sitting with beer on the table in front of them! And another thing I couldn't figure out: they drink beer warm!!!
Maybe there's someone around here with enough experience of both English and American society and orchestra life to shed some light on how alcohol is actually tolerated there. And whether the orchestra managements really do wink at it.
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affz -->>
I now think that someone's "beer-drinking hooligans" remark has some validity. Regardless of whatever challenges, reasonable or not, imposed on them by Frank and his music, that's inexcusable.
==
DO -->>
"beer-drinking" for sure; "hooligans" I have trouble with. I only ever hear the world "hooligan" used in regard to English football fans who vandalize property after games. I'd simply say that in this case their toleration of drinking resulted in lower quality musical product than Frank might otherwise have gotten. If he'd hired an orchestra in the US he'd have gotten much less rehearsal for the same amount of money and therefore probably the same sort of result. And likely Frank would have had some "orchestral stupidity" story to tell about them too.
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affz -->>
I'm considering buying the new Ryko release of the LSO 2CD (to replace my old single CD). Would you recommend it?
==
DO -->>
Hell if I know. I lost track of all the permutations of those recordings a long time ago. If you buy the new one you'll get extra tracks (Pedro's Dowry and Envelopes I think - at least if your single CD is the same as mine). Frank kept editing and editing those tapes hoping to make them better. He had the recordings transferred to hard disk and was tinkering with them on computer (I think the program is called Sound Tools). I couldn't say whether this new disk is edited differently than the previous ones. I doubt that any amount of editing could fix some of the problems with the performances.
It's kind of hard for me to listen to that album - I worked very hard on all that music - and I agree with Frank's attitude that it really doesn't sound as good as it should. Someday, somewhere, some orchestra will play this music really well and we'll all throw the LSO albums away and forget about them. Years after the London session Frank mentioned several possibilities about second performances of Mo 'n Herb with European orchestras - but all apparently fell through. I'd love to hear some other clarinetist play that solo part - I believe I'm the only one who's ever actually performed that music with an orchestra.
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affz -->>
I just recently (yesterday) picked up the new LSO release. I think the sound quality, the music, and of course your clarinet solos, are wonderful. I was wondering if you recorded your parts on Jan 12, 13, 14 (1983) with the rest of the orchestra or if you, Chad, and Ed Mann were able to record your parts back in the U.S. afterwards? Also, I was wondering if you knew more about the new release and what was done in the remix.

==
DO -->>
Those recordings have no overdubs that I'm aware of. Everything was recorded in one big airplane-hanger studio. The whole orchestra took up only half of it. It was a big orchestra - with (as I remember) 9 percussionists (including Chad and Ed). The recordings were made in a sound truck parked outside. There were miles of cable, each section was miked every which way with PZM mikes attached to strangely shaped plexiglas baffles. Each section was recorded to a separate digital track - so it's no surprise that the recording sound have a kind of studio over-dub sound to it.
My strongest personal memory of those sessions is of 'jet-lag'. We had flown into London about a week earlier, there were lots of rehearsals at Hammersmith Odeon (but Frank wouldn't record there because he was bothered by transformer noise backstage) and a new studio was found at very, very short notice. Then the concert at the Barbican happened. That performance was the high point of my life, no question about it - my 20 minutes of fame. I distinctly remember standing on the little podium (in the middle of the string section) just before the performance and reminding myself "I'm playing with the London Symphony Orchestra". It was mind boggling for me. The next day the recordings were definitely anti-climactic for me (not for Frank of course -his entire focus was on getting the music recorded not on the live performance). All my energy seemed to disappear during the sessions and I couldn't keep my eyes open. I can remember sitting in my chair recording Mo 'n Herb and as soon as a take was completed I'd close my eyes and drift off. I had learned the music so well at that point I guess I could probably have played it sound asleep - I almost did.
Another personal story about London that sticks in my mind has to do with the music. Besides playing the clarinet I was in charge of producing all the scores and parts. That took years of course (and lots of other copyists worked on the music) but I did the last few months of intense work getting all the correct parts made up and shipped from LA to London in time. Then I got to London and finally the first rehearsal started. Kent Nagano (then an unknown conductor) decided to start the first rehearsal with Pedro's Dowry. Very early in Pedro is an exposed harp part - and the harpist didn't play it He stopped the rehearsal and asked her why she didn't play it She didn't have the correct part. The librarian of the orchestra had noticed that there was supposed to be a harp part and had given the harpist a copy of the piano part - a valiant effort but a foolish assumption that the parts would have any similarities. It turned out that I had made a mistake and omitted the harp part when the pile of music was shipped over. As they say "I felt a cold rush of shit in my veins" because of a missing part at the beginning of the first piece in the first rehearsal. I copied out a new harp part in the green room. Fortunately that was the only missing music for the entire project. Everything else went smoothly.
Orchestra seating is another subject. As soon as the project was confirmed Frank started redesigning the layout of the orchestra to achieve maximum recording separation. He made charts and graphs of who should sit where. Orchestra seating is very standardized and Frank was making radical changes. My advice against it was met with deaf ears. As soon as rehearsals started certain sections of the orchestra began complaining - each rehearsal had some different changes to the seating arrangement. It became a very chaotic issue which was complicated by the Barbican stage which wasn't really big enough for a 100 piece band. Changes were being made as late as the day of the concert. After the concert Frank gave up on the idea and had the recordings done in conventional setup. All in all, I think he did it backwards. The concert and rehearsals would have gone much better in standard setup while the recordings - in that huge room - could have been recorded in virtually any layout without much problem.
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Frank started Mo 'n Herb's Vacation because I asked him to write a *solo* clarinet piece. He was dubious about the idea, but he did it - eventually it was called "Mo's Vacation" but he didn't like it so he added a simultaneous drum solo called "Herb's Vacation". He still wasn't happy so he added 3 more clarinets and 4 bassoons, bass and a few other audio events. (This is what John Steinmetz and I were recording at Frank's studio) I guess it was still not big enough so he added two more movements for huge orchestra - becoming the "Mo 'n Herb's Vacation" on the LSO album. He finally liked it at that stage, because it was only then that he expressed any thanks to me for asking him to write the piece. After the premiere in London I also got a big hug from him - a very unusual event!
(BTW - I paid him for that piece because I could have had a raise in my salary instead. I think I made the right choice.)

> ***AJ***
> ***TOPIC****: LSO*
> I can add something else that might be interesting, relevant to the discussion about his approach to the orchestra, the LSO sessions and all that.
> Peter Otto worked for Faicwafln (Famous Asshole Italian Composer With A Five Letter Name) for a number of years, and during that time Faicwafln was asked by Ricordi to look at Zappa's scores and advise them as to whether they should publish them. According to Peter, Faicwafln looked them over and advised Ricordi not to publish them because Frank is such a poor orchestrator. I wondered about a lot of his orchestration myself, when I worked on those pieces. As I said, I don't do orchestral music myself, but I certainly could tell that the chances of hearing the harp or bass flute were remote at best when the brass were doing certain things. Later it occurred to me that Franks was ALWAYS thinking in terms of recording. None of his orchestrational weirdnesses are problems when you close-mike and mix everything. Here's the bass flute UP YOUR ASS, FAICWAFLN!
> Along that line, I was interested to hear from David that even those strange orchestrational decisions seemed to work when David heard them live, too, not just on the recordings

ORCHESTRA MUSIC

affz -->>
I had just purchased a record by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra doing"Arcana" by Edgar Varese as well as one other piece. I found it to be very similar to Zappa's "Bogus Pomp" -- any comments?
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DO -->>
Franks admiration of Varese is well known - and his orchestra style showed it: big, sweeping gestures, blocks of sound, thick harmonies, lots of percussion, generally a lack of melody or historical musical forms. Bogus Pomp is probably not the best example of Franks debt to Varese - Pedro's Dowry is the first piece I'd think of. Bogus Pomp has a lot of "Zappa the Parodist" in it - a trait that definitely did not come from Varese. Someone trying to put Frank's abilities as an orchestral composer down would (and did) call his music "derivative Varese". I'd prefer to think of it as "evolutionary". If you can't tell the difference, you're not paying attention.

> ***AJ***
> ***TOPIC****: Pedro's Dowry*

Here's a bit more info re: the piano reduction project. Frank really liked my arrangement of Pedro's Dowry, enough so that he planned to record it. He had me put together an 8 piece band consisting of: Me, Bob, and M.B. on percussion, [I reduced the original 6 orchestral percussion parts to 3, without leaving anything out (or at least nothing of any consequence). It was really tricky, but it worked.], Leonice Shinneman on drum set, [Leonice was also a percussion major at CalArts when the Repairmen were there. He was also in my band The Mope (see aside, below)], Toby Holmes on fretless electric bass and trombone (the trombone joined in on the Lover's Duet melody, with the piano player also on kazoo) [see aside re: Toby H below], Lorna Little (now Lorna Eder, also in the Ear Unit) and Gaylord Mowrey (formerly in the Ear Unit) on pianos, and Lorna's brother Dane Little conducting. So actually a 7 piece with conductor I guess. But 8 people.

An aside - The Mope played at Hop Sing's once, on an ICA concert that included Ocker as a guest artist. We played The Recurrent Obsession, which was first realized on Frank's Synclavier, I think(?). We also played Pink Napkins, note-for-note from the guitar transcription, in an arrangement that I did. Classical guitar (Miroslav Tadic), marimba (me), bass clarinet (Jim Rohrig, also of the Ear Unit), trombone (Toby Holmes), and tabla (Leonice Shinneman). As for that 25:24 thing David mentioned in the interview, we nailed that. But that is certainly not the kind of thing that anyone, including Frank, does on purpose, intellectually. You just feel the space you have to work in, or keep track of the underlying pulse and play. It's intuitive. If you're aware of the rhythm section you can do something against it and get back in synch when you feel it lining up again. It's a lot like Steve Reich's phasing, which is accomplished by rushing VERY slightly. You will notice that that rhythm in Pink Napkins occurs on a repeated figure, so it really is a lot like phasing. We managed to play it by rushing a bit, not by breaking it down like you would with a simpler polyrhythm like 5:4. One other little note about Pink Napkins. I did the copying on that, and there were a couple of measures in the middle that were clearly just plain wrong. I think maybe there was some editing that had been done, and Steve was working from a different version. Or maybe he had just sketched something in but hadn't finished digging out all the notes. Whatever the case, it made no sense. Steve was on vacation and unavailable, so I ended up transcribing those two bars, with Miroslav Tadic's help, I believe (I'm not a guitarist). I doubt that what I came up with would pass muster with Steve, but it's a lot closer than what was originally there in his version.

An aside re: Toby Holmes. Frank was auditioning drummers and bass players. I think it was after dumping Vinnie and Jeff Berlin. It would have been about 1981(?) It was the round of auditions that eventually brought Chad into the band. Anyway, Toby plays both bass and trombone. I had a conversation once in which Toby said that what he listens for first in a piece of music is "does it work?" He's really unprejudiced about styles, and likes just about any music if it's done well, and works for what it is. I was impressed by that attitude. I suggested to Frank that he audition Toby on bass, and told him about this "Does it work?" way of listening. Frank said "That's valid. I listen first for 'How is it recorded?'"

Back to Pedro. So, Frank had me put together this chamber ensemble to play Pedro's Dowry in a version built on the piano reduction. The plan was to record it for release. He asked me how much it would cost to get it together. I made a decision as to how many rehearsals I thought it would take, and I said we would need to get at least $15 per hour. I was probably thinking the project wouldn't happen if it was too expensive, so I bid way low. Frank said "You shouldn't work that cheap". But he didn't offer us more. We were all thrilled just to be working for Frank at all, and for a recording project.

We rehearsed a bunch, and it was coming along. Frank came up to CalArts to hear us rehearse, and even conducted us a bit. He also took us over the coals on some of the rhythms. We were all very nervous.
But Frank was also negotiating with the LSO at the time. He finally decided on Kent Nagano to conduct, and he wanted to have Pedro's Dowry in that project. He asked us if we would rehearse with Kent, and also Chad and Ed, as prep for the LSO recording. So this band had a rehearsal with Kent Nagano conducting, and Ed Mann and Chad sitting in on their respective parts. Frank was tweaking things the whole time. He would have us play certain sections, but have Chad do it reggae style, or some other way. It was a little weird, because this was our project, and we had to just get out of the way for Chad, Ed, and Kent. I don't know how they felt about it, but it was kind of tense.
It turned out that Frank decided against recording this version, because it was already on Orchestral Favorites and now was heading for the LSO album. He told me it just didn't make sense to spend 7 grand recording yet another version. He did like the piano reductions a lot though, and that was gratifying. Once he arranged to have Lorna and Gaylord read through them for him so he could get a sense of them. We did it at CalArts, because Frank didn't have two pianos in one place. To our surprise Frank showed up with this whole entourage. Dweezil was there, just to listen, and a film crew from some Bay Area TV station! They were doing a piece on Frank, and this was his latest thing, so he brought them along and filmed this reading session. He apparently felt no compunction about putting Lorna and Gaylord on the hot seat with no advance notice. A lot of it went well though. They're both really good, and had prepared some of the stuff. But the 3rd movement of Sinister Footwear simply is not sight-readable. He made them play a little bit of it, but then stopped them and said "I won't make you embarrass yourselves". Thanks a lot, Frank. But that was the session after which I got that nice phone call from Gail, so I guess things had gone well.

I'm not an expert on Varese recordings (or which was Frank's favorite), but I can recommend the Kent Nagano Complete Varese recordings with the French National Orchestra on Erato. I have heard rumors that the sessions with Ensemble Modern produced by Frank were somewhat 'unfocused' so I don't really know what to expect when they're released.
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affz -->>
I think there are many Zappa oriented people who could thoroughly dig a program of his work coupled with say, Stravinsky or Ravel, even Beethoven. Symphony subscribers, on the other hand, are not likely to be any more bored or offended by Zappa than by a brain work by a Carter/Wuorinen/Babbitt or a Glass/Reich/Adams, or whatever style symphonies anoint as suitably heavy and important. They might like the funny titles, even.
==
DO -->>
I mostly do agree, but there's a long way to go before this happens. If I can draw some conclusions from the programming of my local orchestra (the Los Angeles Philharmonic), I'd say that orchestra audiences respond best to new music when they have a "great personality" to come out for, I mean a "star composer" - for some inexplicable reason in LA that usually means some old European guy who writes (in my opinion) ugly, incomprehensible music -Boulez and Lutoslawski get the greatest reverence here - since Wittold died the canonization has gone ballistic. Sure, a Zappa piece could replace Carter/Wourinen/Babbitt music any day on a concert - but he couldn't replace the hero composer image that seems so necessary to sell new music to the Brahms and Rachmaninoff fans. I disagree, however, about the funny titles (and I love Franks titles). I

think the average non-Zappa-fan orchestra audience member will turn off to most of Frank's orchestra music just from hearing the title alone. Certainly they will after reading about the scenarios Frank put on them:
Here's some examples--
MO 'N HERB'S VACATION is about Herb Cohen spending money Frank thought wasn't Herbs. (Frank never actually used the word "theft" that I know of, but he was certainly writing music about getting shafted in shady business deals. How many big donors to the Philharmonic Society want to hear music about that?)
BOB IN DACRON & SAD JANE has sections like "Bob's Clothes" and "What Bob's Body Really Looks Like" "Bob Gets Drunk" "What Jane's Body Really Looks Like" A symphony concert with a piece about a pickup in a singles bar? Try again.
SINISTER FOOTWEAR has "Illegal Aliens Just Want To Go Home" as I remember and other stuff like that - Can you imagine that people who pay $45 or $50 per seat for a symphony concert would appreciate being reminded of Prop 187 during the concert? I don't wonder how *they* voted on 187. But I do wonder if their nannies have green cards.
BOGUS POMP (which in my opinion belongs on Symphonic Pops concerts everywhere) is about the bogus and pompous attitudes prevalent in the orchestra and how the individual members want to quit the group to become stars (the violist is singled out for the most abuse while the concertmaster gets the highest praise for the shoddiest work). This is a case of Frank taking dead aim at exactly the hero worship I was talking about above and skewering it unmercifully. And there's a lot of good 'attitude' about Hollywood in there as well.
And finally can you imagine what the Board of Directors of your average symphony would say when confronted with a piece for full orchestra called **PENIS DIMENSION?** (There is a full orchestra arrangement that's never been performed and I think it's going to be a long time before orchestra audiences are ready to hear the question "What's the size of your dork?".) If Frank didn't understand classical players, he also didn't understand classical audiences. That's fine because he wasn't writing for those audiences - he had his own audience. But the symphony orchestra scene is ultimately controlled by what the classical audience wants to buy tickets for and they don't want to spend their money being reminded of exactly the stuff they came there to forget. Lots of orchestras salivated over doing Zappa's music while he was alive - thinking they'd play down some easy charts for "rock band and orchestra" and fill the seats with paying customers who'd come back the next week to hear the B Minor Mass. And Frank just wanted to hear his music played well. Talk about your lose-lose situation.
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affz -->>
Realistically though, it's going to be small, dedicated ensembles, like EM that are going to succeed in making really good performances of Zappa.
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DO -->>
For the foreseeable future, yes that's true. (Sigh)
Frank really wanted to write for the symphony orchestra which he thought was the biggest and best instrument around (at least until he got his Synclavier). He did write smaller ensemble pieces but usually only when those ensembles came to him asking for music - Ensemble Modern, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Kronos Quartet, Aspen Quintet, the EAR Unit - but only EM really made it work.The real pity is that a lot of the full orchestra pieces - Pedro, Bogus Pomp, Bob and Jane, Envelopes, the first movement of Mo 'n Herb - existed in smaller versions before he expanded them for large ensemble, but those versions didn't get documented the way the big versions did: no final score or set of parts were ever made that I remember.

Those versions would be a lot easier to get decent performances of now. But someone would have to do a lot of work reconstructing them out of parts and sketches and scores piled away (who knows where at the moment) before they could be given to an ensemble. I think there's a Doctorate in Musicology and a position at a major School of Music waiting for the someone who sorts through that stack of music. Someday, maybe, but not soon. And here's some tantalizing bits: I remember him saying to me once "There really *ought* to be a 'Music for Guitar and HIGH Budget Symphony Orchestra'." Also, at one point he had Steve Vai do some transcriptions of the bits of Greggery Peccary which had never been written down - so that a full orchestra live performance version could be made. Steve did the transcriptions - I saw them, he labeled it "The Peccary Project" - but it never went any farther.

ZAPPA AND OTHER COMPOSERS

BL -->>
You have mentioned the famous Varese quote Frank used that was talked about in Watson's Poodle Play.
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DO -->>
Watson made a point in discussing Varese that I thought was fascinating and the ramifications of which have been bouncing around in my head since I read it. He said that Varese wrote in his manifesto: "Modern day composers refuse to die" but Frank quoted him in Freak Out (?) as saying "The modern day composer refuses to die". Plural versus singular.
Now you've got to remember that composers throughout this century have been bonding together into collectives for the purpose of getting their works performed - Varese did it, lots of others did it and I did it too: just after I got out of Cal Arts (where I got a graduate degree studying clarinet and composition) I was in a group of composers who founded a composers collective: the Independent Composers Association - known as the ICA. After a few years I became the President and I devoted a lot of time and attention to it - until I realized that being so involved in a composers organization was keeping me from doing any composing. ICA still exists, although it's kind of in a non-growth mode at the moment. Other composers collectives exist here in southern California and I know of them in other parts of the world as well. They seem to be useful but not completely successful method of letting a composer survive in a culture that gives no value to music composition.
Frank would never have been able to work in such a situation - he seemed to thrive on being totally alone while he wrote music or edited in the studio or with the Synclavier. Then he would come out of the studio and present his music to the performers. When given a performance opportunity - a commission, for example - he would expand his plans to include all possible resources (often going well beyond the capabilities of the commissioning organization to keep up). There was no room for sharing.
When I asked him to write a solo clarinet piece (the original Mo's Vacation) I premiered it at a small ICA concert at the Schoenberg Institute at USC. There were other composers pieces on the program, but we used the presence of a "Zappa" piece as a hook to get audience. Ultimately it sounded like just another new-music piece on just another new-music recital. It got a lousy review too.
Another time, Adam Stern and Richard Emmet (you know who Richard is, Adam worked briefly as a copyist for Frank and is now assistant conductor of the Seattle Symphony - and he won a grammy for best Classical music producer, all three of us were at Cal Arts simultaneously) - they arranged the Black Page for a small ensemble and played it at the

beginning of another new music concert. Frank would never show up for such a thing but Gail actually did come that night. It's a common practice that short intense pieces like that get played twice on a concert - but when Adam turned to the audience and asked if people wanted to hear it again there was a small chorus of "No"s. I was very embarrassed because Gail was there.
The moral of all this? It would have been very easy to take a lot of Frank's music and make him sound like just another new music composer of no consequence. Maybe this means that his music is really no better than other composers? Maybe it means that no music can ever achieve greatness is a room filled by only a hundred people? I'm pretty sure that it means that Frank knew instinctively to stay away from the 'new music scene' and away from other composers. The misquoting of Varese's comment sums this up much better than my long discourse. (Sidenote about the letters ICA: while being President of the Independent Composers Association, I worked for Frank and received my checks from his production company -InterContinental Absurdities, Ltd: also know as ICA.
Thus, for a few years my entire life revolved around these two ICA's. There are lots of ICA's in the world: Institute of Contemporary Art (in Boston) and the International Carwash Association come immediately to mind. The first night I worked for Frank - my first day is another story for another time - I was driving home and I saw a van with the huge letters ICA on the side. Paranoia struck me - "what was this? Is he having me followed?". It turned out that Franks road manager (Al Santos?) lived in my neighborhood and drove the company "car' home from work. End of Sidenote)
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BL -->>
Wow. That's quite a connection you've drawn. I read that manifesto also and noticed the misquote and didn't think twice about it. I will now. Frank definitely steered clear of the main stream socially acceptable norms of composition. Frank also knew he had an audience. He referred to us as a small underground following. He also always said that he composed music that amused himself and if somebody else liked it too, that was a bonus. I don't think he wanted mass appeal and composed music singularly for his own enjoyment. Perhaps it would have been different if he didn't have the luxury of performing Dinah Mo Humm once a night to keep his serious hobby afloat.
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affz -->>
No flame intended, but was FZ really totally unexcited by Boulez' music? Comparing 'Naval Aviation in Art' (conducted by Boulez, admittedly) with Boulez' own 'Repons', I think I can hear certain similarities and I'd always assumed that Boulez was one of the composers that influenced FZ.
==
DO -->>
If the subject is "what 20th-century composers did Frank like?" - I think we can all agree Varese is top of the list in a class by himself. After that I remember Frank showing *real* excitement about Stravinsky, Nancarrow and Antheil at various times. Other people might want to add to that list. I personally would not put Boulez on such a list. I would not say Frank was "totally unexcited" - how 'bout "familiar and respectful"?

AJ
TOPIC*: "what 20th-century composers did Frank like?"*
When I was working on the piano reductions Frank asked about the possibility of doing one for Mo 'N Herb's Vacation. I was convinced that the effort would be wasted; the piece was just too thick and too fast to do right on two pianos. He had already had me do Sinister Footwear for only one piano and it didn't work at all. "You lose all the harmony" he

said, which was true. It was an implication of the harmonic structures at best, and ultimately not at all satisfying. That's when we started doing the two-piano reductions. So I felt I knew what Frank would consider a successful piano version of an orchestra piece, and didn't think That Mo 'N Herb would work out to his satisfaction. He made a comment like "How about if we slow it way down? It would be so weird, like a ballad from Mars". But that was not seriously considered. But then he said "Why not do it for three pianos? Morton Feldman has a beautiful piece for three pianos". We never did it, but that comment revealed that Frank was familiar with at least some Feldman, and had liked what he heard.

Naval Aviation is an interesting point. Once, when Frank had returned from Europe (possibly from the recording session of Perfect Stranger in Paris) he mentioned that someone had made a connection between Naval Aviation and one of Schoenberg's Five Orchestral Pieces - I don't remember which number it is but it has the "jumping fish" motive in it (you'll have to check with someone who's studied such things recently - but it's a well known music-history factoid.) The two pieces have theoretically similar textures - drawn out backgrounds with occasional sparse movements on top. Frank was totally mystified by this - he didn't hear the connection at all. Who knows what he would have said had you asked him to compare "Naval Aviation" and "Repons". BTW - the full title of Naval Aviation is "Naval Aviation in Art?" - note the question mark. Gail once showed me a clipping from Life (?) Magazine ca. 1945 which had inspired the title - it was an article about a gallery showing of artists during WWII who had used scenes from the U.S. Navy's aviation squadrons as themes for their artworks. One of the artists was the photographer Steiglitz as I remember. I think Frank found the juxtaposition of "naval aviation" and "art" strange enough for further comment - or maybe he just appropriated a bizarre title for a nameless piece of music. Franks notes on the record jacket say:
"NAVAL AVIATION IN ART? shows a sailor-artist, standing before his easel, squinting through a porthole for inspiration, while wiser men sleep in hammocks all around him."

> ***AJ***
> ***TOPIC****: "Naval Aviation is an interesting point."*
> I was interested by the discussion of this piece. It's one that really intrigues me, always has. It's such an oddball. I think it's strange though that it would be considered any kind of indicator of Frank's interests or influences. It is simply not typical of his work, almost an anomaly. If you played any other of his orchestral pieces and asked me who wrote it (hypothetically assuming I did not already know the piece) I think I could tell you its Frank's right off. But I still don't know what he was thinking when he wrote Naval Aviation, and doubt that he would even make the list of composers whom I would guess as the author. It has always sounded to me like an "experiment" or a study, not a completed work. Something that he tried once, and had enough merit to keep in the catalogue but that he didn't continue pursuing. I'm glad he wrote it though. I really love it. It's a gem.

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affz -->>
The similarities I detect in Repons actually fit very well with the description you give, so maybe Zappa had just absorbed the idioms of modern orchestral music to such a degree that he could use some of the same devices employed by Schoenberg or Boulez without consciously trying to mimican specific piece.
==
DO -->>

I think he tended to stop doing something if he thought he was following someone else's rules or example. He had no trouble making up new rules for each situation. And mutating them so fast no one else could hope to keep up. Gail told me once that Frank had expressed this philosophy: "Always give them what they don't expect". I think that fits all his music. I betcha that if Frank had known Repons or the Schoenberg Orchestral Piece when he wrote Naval Aviation, NAIA? would have been a completely different piece. We can point out similarities between his music and other well-known composers from here to eternity, and we can speculate on how familiar Frank was with their music - but I'm unwilling to award the "Was Influenced By" title to anyone but the most obvious choices. Varese anyone?
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While I was working for Frank a recording of the music of George Antheil performed by the Netherlands Wind Ensemble was released - making many people aware for the first time how insanely great his early works are. These include the Ballet Mechanique (for percussion, pianos, airplane propeller, various buzzers etc), a Jazz Symphony and several sonatas for violin and piano. Frank liked Antheil's music too. Once, in a discussion with Frank and someone else, I mentioned that I thought the Jazz Symphony was the best piece on the album. Frank disagreed and chose one of the violin sonatas as his favorite (I believe it was the one with the drum bit at the end). I was surprised by this but also pleased that he chose a small-scale chamber work instead of a large, colorful orchestra piece. (I've spent a lot of my life playing chamber music and regretted that Frank showed so little interest in small acoustic instrumental pieces. At that time he was writing many large, colorful orchestra pieces. I had assumed - wrongly - that he'd be more interested in Antheil's orchestra work.)

> ***AJ***
> ***TOPIC****: "I've spent a lot of my life playing chamber music and regretted that Frank showed so little interest in small acoustic instrumental pieces. At that time he was writing many large, colorful orchestra pieces."*
> I was in the studio when he was working on the Kronos Quartet piece. He played some of it for me on the Synclavier. The patches or samples he had set up were of string sections - big and lush. That's how he was already hearing and conceiving the piece (orchestral, as usual). I remember thinking (to myself) "Frank, what the hell are you thinking? There's only four of them. It won't sound anything like that". David Harrington told me once that Frank wanted them to record the finished piece and put it on an album along with the Synclavier version. Of course, they didn't.
> This also reminds me of what David told me he said about the Ear Unit line-up when he was working on "While You Were Art" - something like "What an unfortunate instrumentation". (David has no recall of this!) Interesting, since so many people in the new music community seem convinced that the Pierrot + percussion group is almost the ideal vehicle for great ideas in chamber music, and that the only way it could possibly be better is to have a soprano as well!
> I also remember the exact words Frank used once, although I don't recall just what project we were discussing (and truthfully, I don't think it was the Kronos piece - more likely the lack of resources he suffered on the Orchestral Favorites album). He said "You can't do anything with a string quartet". Obviously a few other composers would disagree.

Another time: I was working on something at the house and Frank was nearby. I was whistling while I worked - as I often do - not really aware of what the tune was. Frank said

"Oh, Antheil's greatest hits." and I realized that I was whistling the Ballet Mechanique theme. Highly recommended. I wonder if that album has been reissued on CD.
==
Other artists that I can remember Frank showing interest and excitement about: Stravinsky has already been mentioned - but I direct your attention to L'Histoire du Soldat, a chamber work for small ensemble and narrators. Frank did one of the narration parts at least once that I know of (at the Hollywood Bowl with LA Phil players). I'd say Frank had more interest in early Stravinsky (Firebird, Rite of Spring etc) than middle (neo-classic) or late (serial) Stravinsky. Also, Conlon Nancarrow - the player piano guy from Mexico City.
It's a short list but I'm sure that I'm allowing my own personal attitudes to filter it somewhat: What do I think of Boulez? (What follows is **my** own personal opinion only) Boulez as a composer: his music strikes me as old-fashioned, atonal neo-impressionism - often tending to meander about for far longer than I care to listen. Boulez as a conductor: too precise, uninterpretive, un-creative - often(to my ears) taking great music and making it seem like so many dots on a page. Boulez as cultural icon: how did this guy ever get to be the epitome of serious musical expression? Classical music is in a bad way, mate.
Frank held a high opinion of Boulez, as I remember, although I don't think he could be said to have been "Excited" about Pierre's music. But since Frank wanted the players to play exactly what he had written, there was a certain meeting of the minds between them as to "the composer is always right".
==
affz -->>
What lets FZ's orchestral music off the hook of being "old-fashioned, atonal neo-impressionism", apart from the disclaimer that it's for"entertainment purposes only..."?
==
DO -->>
Nothing - except the totally subjective responses of each of our ears and brains. If you wanted to put Franks music down you might well call it "old-fashioned atonal etc." - it's gotten much worse reviews from classical critics. I do believe that Boulez lives much more consciously in the shadow of the great French composers of the last 100 years - Debussy, Messiaen for example - than Frank lived in the shadow of Varese.
==
BL -->>
What about John Cage? What do you think about his influence on Frank? I've seen some amazing Cage documentaries and the vision he had reminds me of Zappa's.
==
DO -->>
I have had about all the Cage documentaries I can deal with for one lifetime - his music was a very important catalyst for me in my early years, but I sort of saw through it when I got older (and wiser?). I tend to have more interest in Cage's early works (pre- 1960) than in the later stuff. The Imaginary Landscape for radios was something I had organized a performance of - like a few other things from the same period. I can't think of **anything** having less to do with the music of Frank Zappa than the music of John Cage.
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BL -->>
What/how do you think about the Poodle book? (The Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play by Ben Watson)
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DO -->>
I've got the book now and am about 100 pages into it - it's achieved the ultimate low for my reading list: I keep it in the bathroom and read a few pages each time I take a shit. Some

of the information is very interesting - remember that I don't know all that much about large periods of Frank's career, so reading about his early life and early work is news to me.
I suppose it's inevitable that Frank would be subjected to such an analytical history as this -but I was really depressed to discover that it had been completed even before he died. He described what he did as 'entertainment' and rejected every attempt to ascribe higher meaning to it that I was aware of. I was once at the house waiting for him to finish a phone interview and heard him use the phrase "I just like to write this stuff and stick it in my ear." I remember this vividly because such an attitude absolved him of having a higher purpose that us "serious" composers aspired to. In other words, he did what he did and we (the listeners) were supposed to have a good time with it.
Of course it all has some meaning, but I'd say it's too soon by far to spend much effort figuring out what that meaning really is (much less trying to express it in big books). On some level Frank and his music is still living in our minds and memories - we should strive to keep it that way. His music will survive of its own accord if it has any real content. It will turn into rigid 'classical' music soon enough and then let the musicologists and the Marxists write their revisionism. We still have a chance to enjoy this music, to celebrate the mystery of a natural creative artist - Watson is 50 years too early in my opinion.
Moreover - taking a Marxist perspective of Frank is scary and revisionist. Frank was a capitalist out to make a living by doing what was interesting to him and what he was good at. His music was (still is) a family business fighting against musical megaliths. The 'commodification of art' did not bother Frank. He worried more about keeping the inventory well stocked, not about the musicological underpinnings and cultural attitudes that colored other peoples attitudes about it.
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BL -->>
David had this to say in response to a personal response regarding the Boulez thread:
==
DO -->>
Stockhausen and Boulez were mutually influential I believe. I'd have to think that Stockhausen was no more of an influence on Frank than Boulez was. Once Frank mentioned to me "I have written serial music" - but I never did figure out what music of his he was referring to and I never saw him compose using any techniques I would have called serial. I only remember talking to Frank about Stockhausen's music twice - both times after I heard performances of Stockhausen pieces and reported on them to Frank. He was curious but didn't seem particularly impressed or overly interested in either.
Of course, if someone could actually prove to me that Frank was at Darmstadt in the 50's (which I believe has about as much truth as the "he-ate-shit-on-stage" rumor), I have to reconsider my opinions about all of this.
==
BL -->>
He also always said that he composed music that amused himself and if somebody else liked it too, that was a bonus. I don't think he wanted mass appeal and composed music singularly for his own enjoyment. Perhaps it would have been different if he didn't have the luxury of performing Dinah Mo Humm once a night to keep his serious hobby afloat. Additional thoughts?
==
DO -->>
The LSO session was largely paid for by Valley Girl profits. At one point he was working on some album (don't remember which) and I heard him say to the engineer "We've got to get this to sound right. I don't want to put out another album that I don't like" Yes, I guess he had his own ears in mind all the time. Another time I heard him say which album was his favorite. Don't get your hopes up -- I can't remember which one he said.

SYNCLAVIER

affz -->> re: "Francesco Zappa".
I sometimes get the feeling FZ was operating the Synclavier with one hand and holding its instruction manual in the other, all the while recording the outcome. Or perhaps that's what he meant to do all the time?
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DO -->>
Once the original "Francesco" trios were entered into the Synclavier, Frank's only creative input was deciding on which sounds would go with which musical lines. I never did understand what he was trying to do with it, but he picked some very rich synthetic sounds that served to obscure the 18th century music. Hmmm - maybe *that was* what he was trying to do. The music of Francesco Zappa was not what anyone would call inspired writing (sort of behind the times even then) - and it certainly wasn't the kind of thing Frank liked to listen to. In comparison to any other album I ever saw Frank working on, Francesco Zappa was tossed off super quickly - and maybe Frank was testing the limits of the Synclavier. The album, like Francesco himself, disappeared almost without trace. But how many composers discover an eponymously named composer who lived two-hundred years earlier than them? I'm sure glad he did something to honor the co-incidence.
If you're willing to ascribe a metaphysical significance to it (which Frank would haved rejected), Francesco Zappa does a lot to explain why Frank Zappa was such a unique musician. On the other hand, the album Francesco Zappa *isn't* very interesting, is it?
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affz -->>
I went back and read the passage about you in Viva Zappa and it goes pretty much like this: "FZ has two permanently salaried electricians, David Ocker and David DeFuria, who help program the Synclavier."
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DO -->>
Steve DeFuria - I wonder what became of him. He taught me a lot about the Synclavier - and he actually wrote software that we used. In fact, I got switched over from copying to Synclavier because Steve really wasn't available for as much work as Frank wanted done. Steve wrote a column in Keyboard magazine after that for a while.
affz -->>
I have always been blown away by this Varese quote from the New York Times 6 December 1936 (section 2 page 7) - "I am sure that the time will come when the composer, after he has graphically realized his score, will see this score automatically put on a machine that will faithfully transmit the musical content to the listener." Sounds like a vision of the Synclavier to me. I love the fact that Frank was able to realize Varese's vision in that regard.
==
DO -->>
Right - I think about this as I listen to CPIII - Frank always wanted a way of hearing his music just as he intended it and he FINALLY got that. Then he died. It's so sad but also wonderful that he had completed the cycle and fulfilled the dream. Had he lived on we might have seen great changes in him and his music - possibly he would have imagined and reached new heights. Possibly not - we'll never know.
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BL -->>

Any more memories of the Francesco project?
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DO -->>
A few years before I quit working for Frank a new edition of Groves Encyclopedia of Music and Musicians (which may actually have a slightly different name) was published. I saw it in the Theodore Front music store in LA and thought I'd check to see if Frank had gotten a listing. He hadn't but in his place was a listing about Francesco Zappa - unknown Italian cellist and composer. After briefly considering and rejecting the obvious explanation (that the listing was some sort of joke) I figured I'd have to get some of Francesco's music to show Frank. So I decided not to mention it to him till I had some music.
Not long after this he went on tour in Europe. When he returned he had been told by someone about the Francesco listing and he was quite excited by the notion that a musician with essentially the same name had exsisted 200 years earlier. Meanwhile, all I had done was find a person to tell me how to get the music - this was "Jim Lee who used RISM to point using the right direction" - Jim was a musician who did early music arrangements. I met him at Judy Green Music in Hollywood (where all the Zappa scores etc got reproduced - still do, actually) and RISM stands for four long German words which are books of lists of musty old scores in musty old libraries all over the world.
Franks secretary wrote away for xeroxes of some of the scores in US libraries and we soon had more trio sonatas that we could deal with. The music was hand copied manuscripts obviously from Francesco's own period - individual parts, not scores. They were hard to read - I don't really remember what they looked like but I knew enough about 18th century notation to enter them into the Synclavier. The music would not be readable by an average musician today. Frank set me to work on this and I did the most authentic job I could with them. Using genuine string-like synth sounds, adding crescendos and diminuendos. Frank liked playing them for anyone who came into the studio.
When it came to recording them the sound was far too staid and old-fashioned for Frank. He started substituting the most uproarious synthesizer sounds then available (this was before sampling) onto the three parts (two violin and one cello) - instantly obscuring all the nuances I'd added and blurring much of what Francesco himself had written. Some of the combinations he tried in the studio were even more outlandish than what ended up on the record. He must have liked what he came up with however.
Once I was in the studio while Frank was meeting with the designers of the album cover - two women. One of them started talking about reincarnation and how exciting it must be for "Frank Zappa" to discover "Francesco Zappa" who had such a similar career. Frank did not seem to want to entertain such metaphysical notions - he started twisting his neck and rolling his eyes. Everyone laughed and Frank avoided giving the notion any credence.
As the album was going into final production he asked me to write liner notes - this was probably the most original piece of creative work I ever did for Frank - every "Fact" in the liner notes is correct. Francesco did live in all those places and dedicate those trios twice (we had the same music manuscripts from two different sources with different dedications). The attitude about Francesco that I tried to convey was much more akin to FRANK Zappa's attitude than Francesco himself - actually I knew nothing of Francesco's attitude. It's also true that the steam-powered record player was never a commercial success (steam power would have been very high-tech during Francesco's lifetime) - hmm, I guess I made up the part about coal-burning cassettes - and maybe a few other obvious lies. When I finished the program notes Frank edited them somewhat (making improvements for the better - I can no longer remember which bits he edited) but most of it is my writing.

affz -->>
Anyway, yeah, I understand that you as a symphony member might have a different perspective on his music, but you also knew him personally, and that is sort of what is interesting to me. I'd really just like to know what his demeanor offstage was like...I mean, was your relationship with Frank totally professional?
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DO -->>
First, I'm not a symphony player - never was in an orchestra more than a couple concerts post college. I've played lots of chamber music though.
About his offstage demeanor - I remember when I first worked for him I was impressed that he was different than I expected him to be. Much less "crazy". I wasn't a Zappa fan before I went to work with him, but I'd heard 3 or 4 albums and heard a few stories. I asked him early on how he dealt with the fact that he was nothing like his public image and he testily replied that that didn't matter.
Yes, my relationship with him was totally professional. And most of my time with him I actually thought of him as being quite nice. But remember, he was my boss - and nobody likes their boss all the time. Also remember, that he ran a family business - a small one by comparison - but he's the only real "boss" I've ever had. Since then I've been freelancing and now I have "clients" - I think one of the reasons I left his employ was that I couldn't deal with the stress of knowing I could be fired at any time. Now, if I lose one client at least I have the others to fall back on. Also, I had proven that I could work for Frank Zappa - I wasn't a member of the family and there was no real future in the job for me (aside from doing the same things over and over).
affz -->>
You say you kept in touch with him after you left.... was this in a consultation type situation, or did he call to say hello?
DO -->>
He never called me - except once (more on that later) - if you wanted to be in touch with Frank you called him. I could usually get through the secretary if he was available and we'd usually have a phone conversation. Usually such phone conversations turned into an invitation to come over to his studio - where there would be more talk and he would play tapes of works in progress. I think he did that with certain people to get reactions.
I limited myself to calling Frank about once a year after I left his employment. I tried to pick times when I had lots of work but when I wasn't really under deadline so I would have some time to hang out. I didn't want to go over there when I was looking for work because I didn't really want to ask him for work - that would have meant going on salary again. Usually Frank would make it clear that I was welcome to call or come over - it was my idea to limit the visits to once a year or so. After a few years I had plenty of work but I still limited my "hits" of Frank. Once I ended up sitting in the studio with him for about 3 hours with NO ONE else around -it was very unusual to be there when things were so quiet. We talked about lots of stuff -music and politics mostly. I'd say we talked as equals - I wasn't afraid to tell him what I thought about things and we didn't always agree. If you knew him - even for a short while -you couldn't help but be aware what an incredibly intelligent man he was. Don't ask what we talked about - I don't really remember. Just that I was talking alone with him for a long while.
I've heard people who obviously knew Frank a lot less than I did describe themselves in public as his "friend". I am somewhat reticent to describe myself that way - although I'm sure if I did no one could complain. (He apparently thought of me as a friend - see the discussion of While You Were Art - below) Maybe I am reticent because I was an employee for so long. Many former employees left in various forms of disgrace or

disagreement and couldn't have called/visited him like I did. I guess you can call it what you will.
The one phone call I got from Frank was at the beginning of the Yellow Shark project. I was invited over to meet people from Ensemble Modern and I took samples of my computer music engraving to show them. Frank wanted me hired as musical assistant and the EM people were willing to do that. There were some problems getting a contract signed between me and EM - but I started work and made it through the initial rehearsals. Then it was clear that I couldn't come to an agreement (purely monetary) with EM and I was replaced by Ali Askin. I guess if I had kept the job I'd have been one of the piano people on CPIII maybe instead of Ali. It's okay, though. I had my time with Frank. Working with him was like standing next to a whirlwind. Things were always going on. I did it for 7 years - enough was enough.
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affz -->>
BTW, I am making the assumption that you are/were a member of the LA Philharmonic...sorry. well, just the fact that you did work for Frank speaks volumes about your proficiency in your field. one thing I have gathered is that he had little tolerance for fools.
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DO -->>
No relationship with the Philharmonic at all - I'm just another freelance musician from LA - and I no longer play the clarinet (recent decision). I'm earning my living doing only computer music engraving. My current work is mostly for the composer John Adams (Nixon in China, Death of Klinghoffer are his two operas) and the composer William Kraft (now a professor, formerly timpanist, composer and conductor in that very same LA Phil). There's lots of music in LA beyond the Philharmonic. It may be an 800 pound gorilla - but there are plenty of 100 and 200 pound gorillas here too.
You're right, Frank didn't tolerate fools. When I quit from my 7 years with him, I talked with Bob Rice who replaced me as Synclavier operator. I told Bob "You can say anything to Frank, but make sure it's true or you'll get found out. And don't tell him you can doing anything unless you can actually deliver on it." Later I talked to Bob again (when he was on his way out) and he reminded me of that advice and that it had been very accurate.
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affz -->>
I had read a couple of interviews with Ruth Underwood around the time of Frank Zappa's death regarding how she was flattered that Frank seemed to understand what her capabilities were and would compose things for her to do that, although initially challenging, she felt were tailored to the way she played. Did you feel the same way about "Mo 'n' Herb's Vacation"?
==
DO -->>
ABSOLUTELY!!!! I feel the same way about my entire time with Frank. He had a sixth sense about what he could ask people to do that they didn't think themselves capable of - and be right about it.
Basically, when he hired me to copy music he had seen some of my sample work - but he told me to do the best job I was capable of. There was no "hurry up this is costing too much" - or "can't you do it quicker". He wanted the best work possible. As a result I learned (taught myself) how to be a exceptionally good copyist - after I left Frank those same qualities have helped me get and keep!! my current clients.
As for performance stuff - he music was super-challenging - especially in the realm of rhythms and cross-rhythms. When I started with him I had some idea of how to play them. He got me playing things I never could have imagined previously. As for Mo 'n Herb - just

thinking about it now - it's kind of frightening: I actually played a solo from memory with a professional symphony orchestra. I'd played a couple concertos in college. Never had played ANYTHING from memory before that day. Those minutes in the Barbican were the high point of my life - no question about it (I say that line a lot!).
I remember realizing that this quality of being able to exploit peoples talents worked on himself too. Some things Frank was not very good at - for example, playing written music on his guitar - and he managed to always put himself in positions where he didn't have to do that. Other people did it for him. Later, the Synclavier did it for him.
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affz -->>
And do you think, before the Synclavier, Frank normally composed in this manner or altered his compositions to fit his band? (And I don't mean a change an arrangement from reggae to metal; more like bits and pieces rearranged, added or deleted ...).
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DO -->>
Apparently all throughout his career - Frank was ready and willing to reuse anything he had composed previously. That's why there are so many different versions of the same tunes. Why little melodies pop up in totally different contexts. Once I remember I was sorting through a pile of music and found an unmarked piece of manuscript - "What's this?" I asked (Sorry I don't remember what it was - something from a very early album). It was something he hadn't seen in years. He immediately took it into the studio and started working with it as if he had just composed it that morning.
Ooops - I think I'm not answering your question ... here's another try. He always pushed the materials at hand to their limits. These things might be a Synclavier worth a king's ransom, the members of the band, some little electronic gizmo for altering guitar sound, a piece of manuscript paper, a drum box - anything. I guess I tend to think that everything (people or machines) he worked with he worked the same way - he pushed and pushed till he got something that he was excited about. Pretty amazing, huh?
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affz -->> -->>
David said: He always pushed the materials at hand to their limits. These things might be a Synclavier worth a king's ransom, the members of the band, ...
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affz -->>
Yeah, but how many people snapped by being pushed to their limit and being kep near that limit ?
==
DO -->>
A lot, I'd think. I survived for so long because most of my work was done at home on my own schedule - all the copyists provided their own work space at home. The one year I actually worked directly with Frank in the studio was my last year and I craved working at home on my own again. Also, I was never on tour with him and never had to give my entire life over to working for Frank. I don't believe I could have survived that for very long. Of course, I also never had the chance to find out.
Of course my life was best when he was on tour and he'd left me in LA with some large project to finish - score or parts or something.
When he was in town, during the 6 years I was working for him as a copyist I would often have to reach him by phone. To do this effectively I had to know something about his current schedule - was he getting up late in the day and working all night or the other way around. The most amazing thing was that I could have his schedule pegged one day and then call back 2 or 3 days later and be told that he was on a completely different schedule,

it could change that fast. I once asked him about all the different schedules he got on and he just said "I've seen 'em all."
One of the things I learned from Frank was how to live irrespective of a 24 hour schedule - I can be awake or asleep just about any time during the day. For example, today I got up about 11 PM and it's now 1 p.m. the next day (I'm a little tired now and will probably go to bed soon but I've been working all night). I don't think I'd have ever learned to keep such a schedule if I hadn't had Frank as an example. I think of it as his "legacy" to me.
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affz -->>
Do you think perhaps that the humor that's rampant in his work had the unintended effect of relieving that pressure of working near their limits, day after day, night after night?
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DO -->>
I agree with this much less. Things could get pretty humorous around Frank - but they could also get kind of strange. There were times when he was angry about something and every third word he said was "fuck", that I was just plain uncomfortable being around him. Also, if you're sitting in the studio listening to the same track for the 90th time worrying about getting a clean punch-in somewhere or being in tune or playing the right notes or punching the right buttons on the Synclavier - the pressure gets pretty intense. The humor in the tune itself gets lost very easily under those circumstances. And, when you were with Frank - everything revolved around Frank - after all, he was the employer , the creative talent and the star.
I'm not eager to dwell on the negative aspects of working for him - but make no mistake: it wasn't all a good time. However it was usually exciting. I guess I quit working for him partly because I no longer needed those hits of excitement. And when I went to visit him every year or so after I quit I'd get enough of a reminder of what that was like that I felt okay about having moved on to other work.
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affz -->>
Does Ryko send promo copies of each CD to all musicians who played on each release?! (I guess not, can you imagine them sending a copy to each member of the London Symphony orchestra? Like they would even know how to get in contact with them, except for maybe you, Chad, and Ed Mann)
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DO -->>
Are you kidding? The recording industry has a residual program for musicians based on their most recent work - since I haven't worked in recordings at all for a long time I now get only about a $10 check sometime each summer. But my work for Frank isn't part of that 'cause most of what I did was for a regular salary. I was paid extra for each actual recording session - but I never saw a union contract. I sincerely hope the guys who played a lot on the albums (and who play solos) get something for their work which keeps getting released.
As for promos - I got a promo of LSO I (on vinyl) which became hopelessly warped so I bought my own copy of it on CD (my very first CD - years before I had a CD player). To get a promo from Frank you sort of had to be in the room when the box of new pressings was delivered - he'd give them gladly, but he wouldn't go out of his way to distribute them. I didn't get promos of Perfect Stranger or Francesco Zappa - because they were released just after I stopped working for Frank -- and I was the *only* musician on the Francesco album.
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affz -->>

It's interesting that you echo one of the "black spots" of Frank's personality, which all the musicians I've ever seen talk about him allude to him in some way. He seems to have completely loved to just powerhouse you on the spot. I can almost here him saying something like "so you can't play that, huh? Well try this!!" And of course it would be ten times harder. You're the first "member of the band"I've ever actually asked this of. Is it true?
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DO -->>
Sort of - his intent (in my opinion) was to find the best players. Also, I think, he tried to find out just how good they were so he'd constantly ask for a little bit more from everyone. If they delivered, he'd ask for more yet. It wasn't a competition with the player or a putdown on those who didn't cut it. He was just looking for an "instrument" (in this case a band of 5 or 10 people) to play his most difficult music as efficiently and *accurately* as possible. (Also, remember that different people in the band had to have different talents - for example, Frank needed good singers in the band. Often the featured singer was not asked to play any of the unison tuplet lines. Certain guitarists also.)
The unintentional (and wonderful) result of this process of harder and harder music was that the players (myself most DEFINITELY included) would discover that they could do things they never thought themselves capable of. He seemed to have a sixth sense about just what to ask for. In the few cases that I know of where he was wrong about someone and he had to let them go he always seemed (to me) just a little remorseful about it.
Another wonderful result is that he was also pushing players not in the band to higher achievements by publishing the music. I suppose we'll have to wait and see just how much effect his music has on the world of music in general -but the possibility is enormous. You could say the obfuscatory notation was just another way of weeding people out.
BTW - I was never a "member of the band" - I suppose you'd say I was support staff - Copying put me more in the category of a recording engineer than a band-member. I only played on albums in studio recording situations and I only ever appeared in public twice - once with the LSO and once with the Berkeley Symphony, both times playing only the clarinet 1 part of Mo 'n Herb's Vacation.

GETTING THE JOB

BL -->>
How exactly did you hook up with him in the first place?
==
DO -->>
I was a student at Cal Arts in Valencia CA. Ed Mann was a student at the same time. His teacher was John Bergamo (who I also worked with). John had been hired for some session work with Frank (I think he's one of the nameless musicians on Greggary Peccary) and had gotten Ed the chance to get in the band and Frank hired Ed. Frank was looking for someone to be his "musical secretary" and both Ed and John recommended me to him. Then they both told me that I would be getting a call from Frank Zappa. "Sure" I thought "when pigs have wings."
Bergamo had played the Black Page and had lost a copy of the music which Frank had given him. So John hired me to copy the Black Page to give it to Frank. I figured they had showed that to Frank.
One Sunday afternoon (this was June 1977 - as I was eating a pancake breakfast with my roommate) the phone rang and it was Ed Mann saying "Frank Zappa wants you to work for him." so I called Frank and he told me to come right over. I thought it was a job like all my

other work at the time (i.e. "come right now we have music that needs to be recorded at 8 o clock tomorrow morning"). When I got there he took me in the house and showed me piles of music. He started handing me things from the piles and giving me instructions to work on stuff. I asked him if he had seen the copy of the Black Page - he hadn't.
So I had showed up to my interview without the one piece of music that was sure to get me the gig.
Obviously I got the gig anyway and left the house with 8 different projects. He told me which one to do first. I worked like a fiend - in the next 24 hours I probably worked 18 or 19 to finish the project. When I showed up the next day (with the completed project AND The Black Page) he was very impressed. I told him that I was working too hard (I was exhausted). Frank said "So don't work so hard." Funny, at the moment I don't remember what that first piece was, but later he gave me that score - sort of as a memento. A rare thing for him to do. I still have it - so I'll have to look up what I worked on that first day. But where is it? It was music for the new band he was putting together - that was the band with Adrian Belew.

OTHER PEOPLE WHO WORKED FOR FRANK

affz -->>
..."Zappa's staff includes Bruce Bickford, the animator of modeling clay, house copyist steve Vai who works as a transcriber, two permanently salaried electricians David Ocker and Steve DeFuria who work at programming the Synclavier computer, soundmen Mark Pinske, Bob Stone, and Thomas Nordegg."
==
DO -->>
I never met Bruce Bickford. I remember that he was working for Frank much earlier than the Synclavier years - when I would have been an "electrician"(weird choice of words) along with Steve de Furia.
Steve Vai was hired as a transcriber only - he sent in some transcriptions to Frank for free and Frank hired him as I remember. He wasn't a copyist. If you look in the Frank Zappa guitar book you can see an example of what Steve's manuscript looked like and how the copyists transformed it.
Once I was in the studio when something that Steve Vai had transcribed had been recorded or overdubbed to the original track. (This was long before Steve had become a star - he was just the new guitarist in Zappa's band.) I was sitting on a couch next to Steve. Someone said something about how much money Frank had spent getting this all recorded and Steve whispered to me "Yeah, and I got paid $10 a page for the transcription" - which was peanuts for the quality work he did. I whispered back "but now you have a job."
Steve was and is a very nice guy and super talented who (like Frank) deserves success because he works so hard. We talked about a year ago - he was considering hiring me to copy some orchestral music he had written. I guess it didn't happen or he decided I was too expensive. "Orchestra music" - talk about following in Frank's footsteps.

> ***AJ***
> ***TOPIC****: Rhythmic complexity and Steve Vai's transcriptions, was Frank rushing on Pink Napkins, etc. (not re: one specific quote)*
> In the transcription of "While You Were Out" there is a part where Steve put in the indication "No Meter". I copied that piece, and I remember Frank laughing and

commenting on that when I showed it to him. He let it go in that way, but he said "What's that supposed to mean? Everything's in some meter". I think he felt that Steve had sort of copped out on that one. It was clear to me then that, at least for Frank, the meter was an underlying reality, and it didn't make much sense to him to think about his music without it, even if it was an improvisation with no apparent groove.

At one point there were 5 copyists working for Frank simultaneously. Besides me there was Richard Emmet, Adam Stern, Gene Bowen, Tom Nixon, Art Jarvinen (the "Art" of "When You Were Art" who also did some 2-piano transcriptions of Franks big orchestra pieces and who I'm still in close touch with), and a guy named Lee something (whose last name I've forgotten) - hmm - that's more than 5, I know, but there were never more than 5 at one time.

AJ
TOPIC*: "At one point there were 5 copyists working for Frank simultaneously. Besides me there was Richard Emmet, Adam Stern, Gene Bowen, Tom Nixon, Art Jarvinen (the "Art" of "While You Were Art" who also did some 2-piano transcriptions of Franks big orchestra pieces and who I'm still in close touch with), and a guy named Lee something (whose last name I've forgotten) - hmm - that's more than 5, I know, but there were never more than 5 at one time."*
When I was hired Frank had just fired Adam Stern. He needed work done, and it was more than the staff could keep up with, especially since the guitar book was in production. I replaced Adam. There were also Richard Emmett, David, and Lee Scott. While I was still around he also hired David Izzard. That put the total at five, for at least a while. When Frank called to tell me he had to lay me off he said "Sorry, but my accountant tells me I can't afford to put this much money into my 'classical department'." I don't remember exactly who stayed on after that, but it was those with more seniority than I. I was there for 14 months as a full-timer.

There were always several soundmen working at Franks studio (UMRK). Bob Stone lasted as engineer for a long, long time. Tom Nordegg was a kind of Jack of all Trades - I remember he used to run errands on a motor scooter. Plus people at the office. Plus a secretary - Susan Rubio was Franks secretary for a long longtime.
These were just the salaried people - then there were art designers, publicists etc who weren't full time. During tour time the number of employees shot way up of course. All of this revolved around Frank (and Gail) - quite a whirlwind sometimes.
==
BL -->>
David, I've been having a discussion on the newsgroup with someone who said that Steve doubled a lot of Frank's solos for the Shut Up and Play Yer Guitar series. Is this factual? I can hear 2 solos occasionally but never dreamed it was Steve. I knew Frank had a lot of gizmos on stage (dividers, envelopes, sequencers, way etc.) and figured he was punching in so to speak. Any idea?
==
DO -->>
Is possible - I don't remember any specific examples on the Shut Up...series. Doubling one of Frank's live solos was a common technique. The third movement from Sinister Footwear was an FZ solo which Steve transcribed and both he and I learned it and overdubbed it. Maybe someone else as well - Ed Mann? - sorry I don't remember. Steve also overdubbed

the guitar in unison with with Frank's voice on Dangerous Kitchen and another tune (story about roadies/groupies impressing women and skinny-dipping in the pool -don't remember the title). So I guess any solo that got transcribed (check the FZ Guitar Book) was a candidate for overdubbing. Whether any specific title was actually overdubbed, I dunno - if you ever get a chance, I'd suggest you ask Steve. If he was on the recording doing something amazing like that, I'd expect Frank to give him a credit.

> ***AJ***
> ***TOPIC****: "The third movement from Sinister Footwear was an FZ solo which Steve transcribed and both he and I learned it and overdubbed it."*
> Frank told me about that. He said that Steve had come in and done the overdub in one pass. Steve of course wanted to do it again, because he knew he could "do it better". Frank would not let him do it again. He said "If I let him do it again it would be perfect, and no one would believe me that there are two guitars on it".

Frank had a huge pedal board with all his various guitar effects on it. I remember him fine tuning his guitar in the studio at times as well. I guess electric guitar sound is beyond my comprehension, because there were lots of times he'd tweak and tweak the sound and I couldn't hear any difference in what was coming out.

COMPOSITION & MUSIC THEORY

affz -->>
This leads me to some more questions that I would like to ask you since you obviously knew Zappa quite well and even tried to influence the direction of his compositions:
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DO -->>
===TILT===
My job as copyist for 6 of my 7 years with Frank involved *technical* musical matters - mostly notational, sometimes orchestrational. I was the guy who had to remember what the bottom note on the piccolo or English Horn is, for example. However, when it came to the actual music he made all the decisions. He might play tapes for people and measure their reactions - but the music wasn't finished till HE liked it. In fact, to do my job (which I still do for other composers) I've learned not to make suggestions about how the music sounds.

> ***AJ***
> ***TOPIC****: "He might play tapes for people and measure their reactions - but the music wasn't finished till HE liked it."*
> I was in the studio when he was recording one of the songs from Drowning Witch. I don't recall the name of the song, but it has the line "but I like her sister..." with Frank singing. Well, in the studio that night it was Roy Estrada on that part. I had never heard Roy sing live, and I've always loved that Pachuco falsetto. It was so great! But it wasn't going all that well. Frank kept him doing it again and again. Gail came in for a minute and said that Roy really sounded out of tune. Frank had a shit-eatin' grin on his face and said "He always does, but the sound is incredible" or words to that effect. But when the album came out Roy was not to be found. It was Frank doing his low

dumb-sounding thing, and it was, to me anyway (who had heard it done differently) a complete disappointment.
There was another time when there was some discussion about just how something ought to go. Frank asked both me and the engineer what we thought. We both agreed on one way. Frank did it the other.

Here's a example - early on I suggested that a certain cello line in (what became) the 2nd movement of Mo 'n Herb be pizzicato instead of arco. Frank asked me why and I had some reason for it. He actually okayed it and these two particular measures were marked "pizz." When I heard the piece played (by the LSO) those two measures immediately jumped out at me and I thought "That shouldn't have been pizz - they should have remained arco". I never mentioned this to Frank again however so I don't know if he was aware of it.
If you think that two bars of cello in one humongous orchestra piece is pretty insignificant = then you can get some idea of how much I (or anyone) might have been able to influence the direction of his music.
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affz -->>
Do you think he was composing in accordance with some theory or was he just writing down the sounds that came into his head?
==
DO -->>
To be perfectly honest I'd have to answer "yes" and "yes". However, if by "theory" you mean a life-long, all-encompassing theory (like "serialism" or "12-tone") then the answers are "no" and "yes". There were some theoretical things that I saw him do - mostly to do with harmonies. He told me once that he had gotten his sense of harmony from playing the guitar - and I lamented that I never got much sense of harmony from playing the clarinet. For all the time I worked for him I never really understood all the nuances of his chord symbols. Of course I didn't have to - I just copied them for the guitarists to figure out. Eventually some of his favorite chords got written down and categorized into what he called "the chord bible" - chords would get added to each note of a melody and the final result would be five to seven parallel voices with the melody on top. This was used for most of the large orchestra pieces I worked on. That's why Sinister Footwear has such huge wind sections - so he could have these thick chords played by individual instrumental colors. When the Synclavier arrived this system was soon forgotten. He did have some special Synclavier software created which combined music files in various ways. Steve DeFuria wrote it. Can this be considered theory? I think not - it was more of a "Lets try this and see what happens" - musical experimentations where he kept what he liked and tossed the rest of the tapes into the vault. Don't forget - he called his studio "Utility Muffin RESEARCH Kitchen". I believe he did that sort of stuff throughout his career.
==
affz -->>
I know that he always insisted that he wrote music only for his own amusement, but that doesn't seem to square with taking a man like Pierre Boulez seriously.
==
DO -->>
I think of Boulez (and lots of other serious composers) as writing in some tradition - Pierre probably thinks of himself as the continuation of a long line of French composers: Debussy, Messiaen, Boulez ... Another composer I once heard speak said that he wrote super-difficult music in order to "help human evolution along". Frank would have witheringly scorned such notions. He was a guy who wrote music for a living and because it gave him a thrill - and you could see that from the way he reacted to something that was

coming out well. His attitude about why he composed might have changed somewhat after he learned of the cancer, but I wasn't around enough then to say exactly how.
==
affz -->>
Also, how do you think his orchestral compositions fit in with his more song-oriented output? Did he really hear music so abstractly as to perceive both Varese and doo-wop as mere sound patterns, or were the orchestral composing and the song-writing two different activities?
==
DO -->>
The orchestral music started with Frank sitting by himself in a room for hours and hours plunking things out on the piano and writing them down with a sharp felt-tip pen on manuscript paper. Some of the more difficult band-parts might start off the same way, but most of the songs seemed to evolve from simple ideas that he'd formulate in his mind and bring into a rehearsal. He'd keep trying things - if he liked them they were in, if he didn't he changed them. When he got his first drum box - Frank was mesmerized by it and started turning out rhythm tracks by the dozens. He spoke of each track as a future song - I asked him "what about the melodies" - his response was to the effect of "I'll have them." which I took to mean "Don't worry - they're inside of me but I'm not exactly sure what they are yet." He never had any problems coming up with new ideas. They must have been burning inside him - because he worked so hard and so enthusiastically to get them out. I can't imagine ever meeting a more remarkable human being.
==
affz -->>
I get the feeling that FZ probably did not much like the music of pre-twentieth century composers. Was it just that they were old or did he specifically dislike the classical tradition. Did he ever express enthusiasm for any pre-20th c.music? (Apart from Francesco Zappa's, that is).
==
DO -->>
I can't remember even one instance when he and I discussed any pre-twentieth century music - apart from Francesco's. When I was entering those scores into the Synclavier he had absolutely no notion what all the little mordants and various classical notations meant - nor did he seem to care. I doubt he liked Francesco either. He was much more interested in getting the Synclavier to create something wonderful (to him) out of Francesco than in getting it to reproduce Francesco's intentions. He would describe the project to people as a "sort of Switched-On Bach album". That seemed sort of strange to me- maybe because I was such a fan of the original Switched-On albums when they came out. I'd have to say that Frank was simply not part of the classical tradition - he had none of the training and no real interest. Can you imagine him as a kid going to some sort of "Symphonies for Youth" concert, bused to the concert hall and forced to listen to a stuffed-shirt conductor describe The Sorcerer's Apprentice or the Pastoral Symphony? I think we should be thankful that as a kid he discovered the music of Varese and Webern and other classical-world outcasts, rather than listening to (say) Wilhelm Mengelberg conducting Bruckner or Toscanini leading a Schumann symphony or the Alfred Deller consort doing Purcell or Wanda Landowska playing anything or Hamilton-Hardy's Water Music or any opera by Donizetti or The Siegfried Idyll or Wellington's Victory ... (well, you get the idea). Do you think **anyone** who reads a.f.f-z owns a recording of Daughter of the Regiment? If someone does, I think they deserve an award of some sort.
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BL -->>

You have mentioned that you have some insight into Frank's usage of xenochrony. What can you tell us about your memories of how FZ employed this technique?
==
DO -->>
I just read all the references to xenochrony in the Watson book. Frank, as far as I can tell, as always fascinated by the concept of combining different temporal objects in his music. It worked on both micro and macro levels. Let me describe each in turn: First macro - because this seems to be most similar to what xenochrony means. I remember when Frank was working on Sheik Yerbouti and there's a tune called Rubber Shirt which is a combination of three solos - guitar, bass and drums (Frank, O'Hearn and Bozzio I believe)which Frank combined in the studio using tape transfers. He was really excited about this -and he played it for me, saying something like "The solos just seem to work so well together." I doubt it was an accident - my guess is that he tried a variety of different combinations of those tracks till he found the one way he liked the best.
Another time, when we were working on some of the large orchestra pieces, he said something about making a mosaic out of various pieces - taking the scores, cutting them up in various ways and pasting them back together into some sort of composite score and then checking out the results. This never happened because it would have been such a cost-intensive project to combine the score into something playable, produce the parts, hire the orchestra etc. He could get the same effect more easily and with instant feedback to his ears by using tape machines. When he got the digital 24 track recorders he could really indulge this sort of thing because he could re-record and re-record without losing any fidelity.
Yet another time, I had learned the melody which would become part of Sinister Footwear(called at the time "C Instruments"). It had lots of cross-rhythms (the micro level stuff, see below), tuplets-galore plus lots of mixed meters. Playing 9 over 5 is no picnic, but it's a lot easier if you can keep your foot tapping quarter notes. You couldn't do that in this piece because there were all sorts of 5/8, 9/8 bars that required more attention to underlying beats. I really woodshedded this part a lot and could do it pretty well. When I got to the studio he wanted me to record it against an already recorded rhythm box which played steady 1/16ths but with **random accents**. So there were three levels of time confusion: tuplets, mixed meters and the silly accents. I guess I must have done okay at that -but I remember distinctly that my head was spinning trying to pay attention to the rhythm track just enough to keep the beat but not enough to let the accents throw me off.
Now, the micro level: we call these things tuplets now (a word instigated by computer music programs) but when I first went to work for Frank they were called "cross rhythms". A triplet is the simplest tuplet - three notes in the time of two. When I went to work for Frank I was just learning to do quintuplets (5 in the space of 4) and septuplets (7 in the space of 4). I learned a lot about this stuff real fast because I was both playing and copying the stuff. At one point he told me that he thought I really understood cross-rhythms very well - definitely a high complement. Another time he told me that he had gotten interested in these cross-rhythms listening to jazz and he mentioned Gene Krupa drum solos and fills and said something like "it all just reduces to fives and sevens if you keep a steady beat going as he slows down"
Tuplets are musical ratios - heck, all music reduces to rational mathematics (except for computer programs which make us deal with decimal mathematics, but that's another rant of mine). Intervals, meters, rhythms, even formal structure eventually reduces to numbers like 4/4; 3/4; 5/8; 17/32 etc, etc.
The higher the numbers - especially prime numbers - the harder the music. The farther the numbers get from powers of 2, the harder the music.
The Black Page number 1 is a good place to look for tuplets. It has eleven tuplets and some tuplets within tuplets - for example a large triplet, with a quintuplet on the first part of

the triplet and sextuplets on the second and third parts of the tuplets. The highest number ratios I ever worked on for him were in Mo 'n Herb's Vacation - 17 in the time of 16, or 17 notes in the time of 4 quarters (actually quite easy to play if you think of them as rushed 16th notes). In the first movement there's a place where 4 clarinets are playing 17 tuplets in parallel harmony - it's really the climax of the movement. Once I asked him why he didn't seem to write 13 tuplets - I was familiar with 11 tuplets and 15 and 17 tuplets at the time. Naturally, he pulled out a page that he had just been working on and there was a 13 tuplet (it's now in the last movement of Mo 'n Herb somewhere).
The addition of the Synclavier confused the issue of tuplets, because the software would take note event lists (resolved to the nearest 2-milliseconds) and try to make notation out of them, showing only standard power-of-two notation: 1/8s, 1/16ths, 1/32nds, 1/64ths. Naturally, what showed on the screen was a useless blur - even if the actual performance of the tuplet music would be absolutely perfect. The notation could then be edited to look like tuplets -but it was a real kludge operation. Frank spent hours and hours editing files at the Synclavier, but because it was so much more complicated than the notes-on-paper stuff and because Frank could do it all by himself, I know a lot less about what went on cross-rhythmically in the Synclavier. One thing does merit mentioning - that's the swap software. Steve DeFuria wrote some simple programs which took two note lists (each one representing a music file) and made two hybrid lists - one with the rhythm of the first file and the pitches of the second file, the other with the rhythm of the second file and the pitches of the first. There were some other software tricks that Steve wrote software for, but I can't remember exactly what. In this way Frank was using the Synclavier to create new combinations of old stuff which he could use or discard based totally on whether or not he like the way it sounded. To me, this seems exactly analogous to combining three different solos into one piece using tape techniques.
Finally - let me say something about Steve Vai's transcriptions of the guitar solos. I copied many of them and proofread the entire Frank Zappa Guitar book many times. In my opinion, the transcriptions were a lot more complicated than they needed to be - especially if they were intended to be used for anyone to play from. Often I would find places where Steve's notation could be reduced to something simpler, but Frank would always resolve the differences in favor of the most complicated notation. In Steve's preface to the book he says"on a few licks, where there are several ways to write them, I chose the way which accents the phrasing" Ultimately I never really believed that - no matter how precise the transcriptions got, a performer still has to add his own phrasing to a performance or listen to the tape of the original performance to get the little nuances that didn't get (or couldn't be) written down. In the Guitar Book there is a section of 25 over 24 - I found it in Pink Napkins - but there may be some other examples of similarly high ratio rhythms in there. You have to wonder what exactly was going on in his mind as he played it - I sincerely doubt that he was consciously trying to play 25 notes in the time of 24. He may have been trying to play in a slightly different tempo than the rhythm section - a sort of live xenochrony. More likely however he was either rushing slightly or the rhythm section was slowing down slightly. In that sense, I guess it's just like a Gene Krupa drum solo.
The notion of combining different times - on whatever level - is really, really essential to understanding Frank's music - and it's an element that sets his music apart from everything else. And someone could probably spend a lifetime trying to understand it all.
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= **affz -->>**
Was listening to Mo and Herb's Vacation last night. Did Frank ever arrange bits of it for the band? The beginning sounds like an abstracted version of "I know you want someone to show you some tits."from Wet T-shirt Nite on Joe's Garage.
==
DO -->>

Yes. The music started as a solo clarinet piece "Mo's Vacation" then Frank added a drum part "Herb's Vacation" - when played together they became (you got it) "Mo 'n Herb's Vacation". I think Ed Mann learned some of the solo part and there was a bass part as well(emphasis on the "I think" in that sentence 'cause the bass part may have only arrived later). In any case, I remember going to a rehearsal once and playing the music for Frank with Vinnie Colliuta. Gail was there taking pictures of me standing next to Frank in front of some microphones - I wish I had copies of those pictures now.
I do remember that the opening lick of Mo 'n Herb made it into Joe's Garage - I'll trust that you've picked the correct spot. Hey, if everything is just one Big Note then Frank had absolute power to borrow from himself at will, why should we be surprised.
==
affz -->>
Would it not be possible to compare what Frank did at the macro level with the sort of layering that Stravinsky does in his work? Stravinsky would frequently take lines that had a life of their own and combine them with other lines of similar independent character. In many cases the lines weren't in the same meter or key. For that matter, Ives did the same sort of thing with hymns, folk songs, and patriotic tunes. This comparison is not meant in the least to diminish Frank's achievements but is merely a speculation about the source of such ideas.
==
DO -->>
I don't think this diminishes Frank at all - on the contrary you have written a clue to why Frank has a chance at being remembered as a composer of the same level as Igor and Charles (although I'm sure had I met either Stravinsky or Ives I'd have called them "Mr. Stravinsky" and "Mr. Ives"). Musicians often reflect that theft is a perfectly acceptable concept in composition - as long as you add something new. The whole idea of "Variations on a Theme of _____" begins with the appropriation of someone elses work. The thing that is important is that you create something original based on the other persons ideas. Composers are put down for sounding derivative - that was not a problem for Frank.
==
affz -->>
The mosaic idea is a really neat one. Do you know of any pieces that were composed and released this way? My mind keeps turning to the notion that Frank was like Mozart in the sense that he was exposed to many different styles of music in a very short span of time. While Mozart toured Europe with his father and listened to many styles of music, Frank had a record player which permitted him to go places without ever leaving California. It is the same technology that would permit him freedom to experiment with this mosaic-like method of composition.
==
DO -->>
To my knowledge no "on paper" piece was every really done this way - it would have been just TOO expensive. It was done a lot on tape however. All the recordings of the 88 band "With No Studio Overdubs" were still edited a lot - although with the intent of sounding like a single performance. And anything that could be called a "tape collage" could also be thought of as a mosaic. The Synclavier would also have made this possible - but I'm not sure if Frank ever tried it. The analogy with Mozart is interesting - but remember Mozart was privileged in his time to travel around and hear the different musics. Today anyone with the money to buy CDs can hear almost anything - and if you don't have the money there are lending libraries and certain progressive radio stations that'll expose you to new stuff. The thing that unites Wolfgang ("Herr Mozart") and Frank is that they took what they heard and went with it.
==

affz -->>
Your description of cross rhythm is excellent! Do you teach?
==
DO -->>
Thanks - I've never taught (beyond a single guest lecture in someone elses class), I've never played in orchestras (beyond being hired for a single performance only) and I've never played commercial music in studios (no film scores or record dates). At this point I haven't played in over a year - and don't miss it. I'm still debating with myself whether I really have anything to say as a composer - and whether, in our society, anyone really cares.
==
affz -->>
The mention of Steve DeFuria's software is really interesting in the sense that it would permit (as you pointed out) easy recombinations of already existing material. In listening to Frank's work I get the impression that he hardly (if ever) threw anything (compositionally) away. Did you find that to be true when you worked for him?
==
DO -->>
Yes - this is an important point when you notice thematic similarities between (say) Mo 'n Herb and Joe's Garage. There was recent NPR piece about Frank (on Mother's Day) where Gail said that since all of Franks music was written by the same person it all had a certain unity in the way it sounded. She's absolutely right. Frank never threw anything away - compositionally or otherwise. If you ever saw the Zappa tape vault you'd never question this point again.
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affz -->>
I agree that Vai's transcriptions are overly complicated. Why do you think Frank resolved differences in favor of the more complicated notation?
==
DO -->>
Lots of possibilities...
there's the "feeding Frank's ego" answer, there's the "weeding out the weak players" answer, there's the "lack of formal training" answer (both for Frank and Steve -please note: I do NOT think either of them were hampered by not studying these things in college - probably they were liberated by not having to reconcile some professorial attitudes), there's the "Frank never had to learn it off the page so it didn't matter" answer, there's the "Steve was trying to notate the un-notatable" answer, ... and, finally,... there's the "there really is a difference but I just can't hear it but Frank and Steve could" answer.
Maybe there are other answers. You pick.

Frank Zappa and The Abnuceals Emuukha Electric Orchestra September 17, 18 and 19, 1975 - Royce Hall, UCLA

What follows is an ongoing attempt to document the Frank Zappa orchestral performances that took place in Los Angeles in September 1975. Very little has ever been documented about these shows and this serves as an attempt to shed some light on them.
The Abnuceals Emuukha Electric Orchestra was put together in September of 1975 to present a series of orchestral pieces written by Frank Zappa. Michael Zearott was the conductor and Frank produced and recorded most of these

shows along with special recording sessions. Forty musicians were assembled by Zappa with help from Earle Dumler and Mike Altschul. Frank stated that the cost to present this material was $120,000, twice what it cost to put on the Zubin Mehta, L.A. Philharmonic Contempo Concert that included a special cast of Mothers. Royce Hall at UCLA held 1500 people for two public performances on the 17th and 18th of September 1975, and with as much money as Frank had put into the project, he was sure not to see any profit at the door. So the 18th performance was recorded along with some separate earlier closed recording sessions that day. On the 19th, the Hall was closed for recording only. Much of these performances were released on the album "Orchestral Favorites" a controversial release put out by Warner Brothers against Frank's wishes. Check out Biffy's website for more on this. The orchestra seemed to really get into the spirit of the pieces. Pamela Goldsmith talks about the shows elsewhere on this web site. Frank said that after the orchestra went through 'Pedro's Dowry' for the first time, there was an ovation from the performers themselves.

This is the list of musicians that I have put together from various sources. Big thanks to Charles Ulrich (and the many musicians who he's contacted), Pamela Goldsmith, Bruce Fowler, Malcolm McNab, Don Waldrop, Ralph Grierson, Rob Sweet, Reinhard Preuss, Uli Mrosek, Michael Gula, Roman Garcia Albertos and to Frank for talking on the radio a little about it in 1975.

musicians:

Frank Zappa - guitar, composer
Alan Estes - percussion
John Bergamo - percussion
Emil Richards - percussion
Tom Raney - percussion
Terry Bozzio - drums
Dave Parlato - bass
Mike Lang - keyboards
Ralph Grierson - keyboards
Bill Mays - clavinet
Bobby Dubow - violin
John Wittenberg - violin
Pamela Goldsmith - viola
Jerry Kessler - cello
Lou Anne Neill - harp
Gene Goe - trumpet
Malcolm McNab - trumpet
Roy Poper - trumpet
Bruce Fowler - trombone
Jock Ellis - trombone
Kenny Shroyer - trombone
Dana Hughes - bass trombone
Don Waldrop - tuba and contrabass trombone
Arthur Briegleb - French horn
David Duke - French horn
Todd Miller - French horn
Bob Henderson- French Horn
Dave Shostac - flute, tenor sax
Sheridan Stokes - flute, sax
Ray Reed - flute, alto sax
Vic Morosco - clarinet, alto sax
Jay Migliori - clarinet, tenor sax
Mike Altschul - bass clarinet, baritone sax
Earle Dumler - oboe, English horn, bass oboe
John Winter - oboe, English horn
Joan Elardo - oboe, English horn
JoAnn Caldwell - bassoon
Bobby Tricarico - bassoon, contra bassoon

guests:
Don Van Vliet - soprano saxophone (Strictly Genteel)
Tommy Morgan – harmonica
Andre Lewis - organ

unconfirmed:
David Riddles - bassoon

additionally:
Ray Pizzi - bassoon (quit during rehearsals)

last updated: February 25, 2008

Orchestration

Bogus Pomp, Strictly Genteel and Pedro's Dowry

3 Flutes (I doubles Piccolo)
3 Oboes (III doubles English Horn)
3 B flat Clarinets
I doubles E flat Clarinet
II doubles B flat Bass Clarinet
III doubles B flat Contrabass Clarinet

3 Bassoons (III doubles Contrabassoon)
4 French Horns
3 B flat Trumpets (I doubles C Trumpet)
3 Tenor Trombones (III doubles Bass Trombone)
Tuba
Harp Amplified
4 Amplified Strings
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
'Cello
Keyboard I
Clavinet, Grand Piano, Celesta, Arp 2600, Arp String Ensemble, Small Cheap Tambourine
Keyboard II
Clavinet, Grand Piano, Minimoog, Small Cheap Tambourine
Keyboard III
Clavinet, Minimoog, Small Cheap Tambourine
Electric Bass (doubles Vacuum Cleaner)
Drum Set

Percussion I
Bells, Xylophone, Small Triangle, Small Cheap Suspended Splash Cymbal, Small Suspended Cymbal, Medium Chinese Opera Gong, Balinese Gong, Small Piatti, 5 Temple Blocks, 5 Cowbells, Doorbell

Percussion II
Electric Vibraphone, Medium Triangle, 5 Timpani, Tambourine, High Chinese Opera Gong, Balinese Gongs, Medium Opera Gong, Tam-tam, Deep Tam-tam, Castanets

Percussion III
Electric Marimba, Large Triangle, Castanets on Stand, 5 Small Garbage Cans, Thai Gong, Low Thai Gong, Bongos, Rhythm Logs

Percussion IV
Xylophone, Huge Bass Drum, Loose Bass Drum, Snare Drum, 5 Garbage Cans, Piatti, Tam-tam, Cowbell, Triangle, Chimes, 5 Woodblocks, Bongo

NAVAL AVIATION IN ART?

note:
This is the instrumentation called for in the original score. The instrumentation at the actual concerts was probably different.

2 Flutes
2 Alto Flutes
2 Oboes
1 English Horn
1 E flat Clarinet
8 French Horns
Tuba
Violins I

Violins II
Violas
'Cellos
Contrabasses

Setlists

September 17, 1975
Bogus Pomp
Revised Music for Low Budget Orchestra
Pedro's Dowry
Rollo
Dog Meat
Naval Aviation in Art?
Improvisations
Sink Trap
Duke of Orchestral Prunes
Strictly Genteel
September 18, 1975
Bogus Pomp
Revised Music For Low Budget Symphony Orchestra
Pedro's Dowry
Rollo
Black Napkins
Dog Meat
Naval Aviation In Art?
Sink Trap
Duke Of Orchestral Prunes
Steno Pool/New Brown Clouds (from Greggery Peccary)
Strictly Genteel

GREGGERY PECCARY

BL -->>
Do you have any idea when and with whom Greggery Peccary was recorded?

DO -->>
I remember going through the folders (leatherette with gold lettering) which held the parts for the Abnuceals Emulkha Electric Orchestra (I never knew what that title meant - I'm probably not spelling it correctly) which played the famous Royce Hall concert. That was before my time. It was a very large big band, essentially - 4 or 5 winds (all multi-doublers), 4 or 5 each of trumpets and trombones, horns & tuba (maybe), 3 keyboards, an amplified string quartet, loads of percussion, plus guitar, bass and drums (of course). I used those parts when I reorchestrated Bogus Pomp for large orchestra. Also in the folders were the parts to Greggary Peccary - actually the G.P. music was in sections, a few of the titles were Big Swifty, Brown Clouds, something about Billy the Mountain.
Anyway, in one of the folders was a list of the players - all studio people, good ones. I remember only a few of the names - Pam Goldsmith was the violist (she had to play the fiendish viola solos in Bogus Pomp). Her part to that piece had been run over by a tire of

some sort - like a car or motorcycle tire. I met her once and asked if the part had been run over intentionally. She denied it. Other names that I remember are Earle Dumler (an oboist who was also the contractor), Emil Richards (percussionist) and Malcomb McNabb (trumpet).
Chances are good that that list - and all those folders - are still sitting up at the house, maybe someone knows who to ask to get access to it.
Another way of going would be to look for the contracts filed at the Musicians Union here in LA - although I have absolutely no confidence that such a thing would still be accessible or be any easier to find than the list up at the Zappas. All I can do for you is promise to ask questions in case I ever run into some of these people - I have very little contact with studio types, many of whom are probably close to retirement by now.
I'm sure these people would have gotten appropriate credit on any album Frank was in charge of. They certainly deserve it.
Did I mention that Greggery Peccary is my FAVORITE FZ piece?

> ***AJ***
> ***TOPIC****: "Do you have any idea when and with whom Greggery Peccary was recorded?"*
> I know that Bergamo played on it, because he still has some pages of his parts and has talked about it with me and others I know.

WHILE YOU WERE ART

> ***AJ***
> ***TOPIC****: While You Were Art*
> As David knows from past conversations, I really don't want to tell the whole story of this piece as I know it. Some of it would be an embarrassment or offense to some of the characters involved, and falls strictly within the category of "nobody's business but their own". But I have wanted to add a few details or clear up some things, because to this day people I don't even know want to talk to me about the infamous incident. So here goes...

DO -->>
Art Jarvinen is a composer and percussionist and sometime music copyist. He's also my friend and his company, Leisure Planet Music, currently publishes my music. He's a member of a well-known new-music ensemble called The California EAR Unit. He was one of Franks music copyists - he worked on extracting orchestra parts and also doing two-piano reductions of some of the large orchestra music. (His reductions are available from Barfko-Swill.)
The EAR Unit plays a regular series of concerts at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art -either part of the (unjustly) famous Monday Evening Concerts or a separate series of EAR Unit concerts which had sprung from their frequent Monday Evening performances.
Sometime around 1983 Art asked Frank if he would compose a piece for the Ear Unit to perform at one of these concerts. Lots of groups were having the same idea - the pieces for Kronos and the Aspen Wind Quintet were happening about this time.
Frank was eager to use his new Synclavier to write the piece - and an agreement was made and a date set. I don't believe the Ear Unit could pay Frank anything for this, so

Frank could do pretty much whatever he wanted. Frank wanted to arrange his piece While You Were Out - a transcribed Guitar Solo - he says that the Unit asked him for While You Were Out, so that's probably true. (Steve Vai's original transcription appears in the FZ Guitar Book.) This was when I was working as a Synclavier assistant and part of my job was to work on the computer files, entering and modifying them according to Franks instructions.

> ***AJ***
> *"Frank wanted to arrange his piece While You Were Out - a transcribed Guitar Solo - he says that the Unit asked him for While You Were Out, so that's probably true."*
> Not true. I asked Frank if he would be willing to write a piece for us.
> Hell, it worked for David, so I figured I'd give it a try. He said that he couldn't really commit to writing us a whole new piece (no money was changing hands, that's for sure - and I still really appreciate Frank's generosity in this regard), but suggested he would maybe be willing to arrange something for us, preferably one of the guitar transcriptions. I really liked Stucco Homes and suggested that. He said "How about 'While You Were Out'? They're basically the same piece anyway, since they're parts of the same improvisation, but WYWO would work better." So the specific piece was Frank's own choice. I think now, based on all David has said, that he was basically already interested in doing this as a Synclavier piece anyway, and found this a convenient way to give me a piece. The big problem though, was that he didn't like our instrumentation (as I mentioned earlier). The piece as it eventually came out on Jazz From Hell is quite different in many respects. I still like the original best.
> As for the title, I remember after I had gotten all the practice tapes David asking me how I felt about it, and I hadn't even noticed it. The tapes were all hand labeled and all I noticed was "Art". I just thought they were all part of a batch of tapes for me, this project, whatever - not a title. I am reminded of it once in a while because "While you were out..." is written on a lot of memo pads, which is where I assumed Frank picked up the phrase.

I remember asking Frank what the title meant. He said "While You Were Out" referred to someone who had gotten out of prison - I had the impression it was someone specific, but I'm not sure who. (ASIDE: Another time someone asked Frank what had happened to the other members of his first band in San Diego - "In prison" was his instant reply.) At some point the title was changed to "While You Were Art" - this had a double meaning - it referred to Art Jarvinen himself, who was motivating the project and acting as go-between between Frank and the ensemble - several of whom had to be convinced to go along with this project. "ART" also referred, I think, to the "ART" in worlds like "Art-world", "Art-music" or"High-art" - in other words, Frank was using it as a term of derision.
The Monday Evening Concert Series at the County Museum is known world-wide. It's decades old and has an exalted reputation in the new-music world based on the participation of such luminaries as Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Boulez. I've performed it many times. Seen from close up, the programming is overly in-bred, academic, and boring. To make matters worse the concerts are given in the Museum's Bing Theater which has perfect acoustics for a movie theater - i.e. deader than a door-nail - lousy for music. It seats about 600 - but a MEC event rarely draws even 200. If it does, the regulars comment about the "good attendance" without realizing how silly they're being. If you look at the audience during a concert you'll see a lot of empty seats. Frank wanted to check these concerts out - something about checking the acoustics. So I accompanied him and (I think) Gail to a typical event. He arrived late and wanted to sit in the very last row because

"there'd be less sound bouncing off the back wall". I remember sitting with him in the Museum's cafeteria during intermission. He was doing a good job of ignoring everyone - and the audience was doing a good job of ignoring Frank. I doubt Frank really learned anything useful about the acoustics -he probably learned a lot more about the Monday Evening Concerts. It didn't take long before it became clear that While You Were Art was going to be very difficult and that there was not going to be enough time for the players to learn the piece and be able to give it a decent performance. Frank's solution to this was to have the players pretend to play their parts while the Synclavier output was played on a PA system. This was before Milli-Vanilli, but the concept of a band miming to pre-recordings was well known. It was not unusual for there to be an amplified piece on an EAR Unit concert. The tape would be recorded on a video cassette in utmost digital high fidelity using the F-1 format. According to Frank's wishes the miming was to be a secret - the ensemble was to make every effort to make the performance look as though they were actually performing.
The instrumentation was close to this: flute, clarinet, violin, cello, multiple keyboards and percussion.

> ***AJ***
> *"The instrumentation was close to this: flute, clarinet, violin, cello, multiple keyboards and percussion."*
> I seem to recall that there's something in there that is essentially a bassoon part. Probably we were thinking that a clarinet with enough wires attached to boxes could believably be making that sound. But Frank did not right off the bat tell me we were going to lip-synch. In our initial discussion about the piece and what was available instrumentally, he was most concerned about having Clavinet, and wanted to be sure we could get one. He wasn't really interested in the piece unless he could have the Clavinet.

Each part was developed as a separate Synclavier track. The music was printed out for each player and a special analog cassette was recorded for them to practice along with. One side of the cassette had the final piece - as it was to be performed - and the other side had a practice recording with that players part brought forward in the mix. This was to make it easier to learn. One of the contributing factors to the difficulty of the learning the piece was the Synclavier's music-printing capabilities - which were (uh) "limited".

> ***AJ***
> *"One of the contributing factors to the difficulty of the learning the piece was the Synclavier's music-printing capabilities - which were (uh) "limited"."*
> Limited my ass - they were "for shit!". The piece was much harder to learn than it would have been with real music copying having gone into it. I might as well point out here that, contrary to some accounts, I never told Frank we couldn't play the piece. We could have. I told him that I didn't think we could do it justice in the time left between when he delivered it and when we were scheduled to play it. Maybe that was his intention all along, I don't know. I always thought we would get to play it live some time after the lip-synch thing, but then the shit hit the fan and we didn't get to keep the piece.

Finally a master tape to be used in performance was recorded on video cassette. A good deal of effort went into making this tape - and Frank and Bob Stone wanted to know what

format the tape should be - Beta or VHS? After considerable checking with the members of the ensemble Art returned with the answer "Beta" - I remember that it was difficult to get a beta-max video recorder installed in Frank's studio for this purpose.
Frank chose not to attend the concert. No one in the (sparsely attended) hall knew of the deception - except me and a few close friends of members of the Unit. A lot of useless electronic equipment was brought on stage for the performance, keyboards were conveniently turned so that the players hands were not visible from the audience. Microphones(non-functional, of course) were everywhere. The players who knew their parts best were placed forward on stage. Art himself, who had learned his part on Marimba well enough that he could have actually played it, was front and center. Unlike a clarinet or flute, it's almost impossible to fake playing a marimba so he created some special mallets with huge puffy heads on them allowing him to actually hit the bars and make an insignificant sound.
As soon as they turned on the sound system I knew there was a problem. I described it as "a wall of hiss" and when the tape started to play it was instantly clear that the sound was coming from one of the practice cassettes, not off the digital beta-max tape. I slunk down in my seat, I was sure that every one in the audience would instantly know what was going on. I mentally prepared myself for a disaster. Of course you must remember that I'd heard this exact same tape countless times in Frank's studio where the sound quality was the best. Even so, the sound in the Bing Theater that night can only be described as "wretched". Much to my surprise the audience sat quietly throughout. And there was polite and extremely unenthusiastic applause afterwards. The Unit trudged out for an bow and then went right onto the next piece.
After the concert I went on-stage to talk to Art. He was standing in a small group - one of whom was the composer Morton Subotnick - a former teacher of mine whose music is frequently performed by the EAR Unit. I told Art "It sounded Awful!" Bad-mouthing a performance directly like that is a "no-no" in the chamber music world and this comment was greeted with some surprise. When it was explained that the "awful" comment referred to the quality of tape-reproduction, it became immediately clear that the audience had not understood the pantomime quality of the performance.

> ***AJ***
> *Comment: "...the audience had not understood the pantomime quality of the performance."*
> The only one who got it, that I know of for sure, was Steve Vai. He told me he knew immediately. He also was clearly disappointed. He said "You guys played Carter on the same show. If you could play that you could have played Frank's piece." He was right, but it was a matter of timing (in those days we rehearsed the shit out of things like Carter pieces) and Frank's designs for the piece. We agreed to do it a certain way, at Frank's suggestion. He didn't want to hear us play it at all.

In fact, of the audience comments I heard or heard about, the closest to anyone figuring it out was a person who was sitting close to the stage. He said "I wondered why there wasn't more direct sound from the instruments themselves." In my opinion, most of the audience was not interested in Franks music at all - and had not paid attention. There were two reviews which didn't mention the deception.

> ***AJ***
> *"There were two reviews which didn't mention the deception."*

The biggest let-down to me was that "the piece" basically got no notice at all. It's a really beautiful work, and still one of my favorites in anyone's catalogue. I just wanted people to hear it, live or Memorex, and to play it and participate in it. It came out of a time when I think Frank was at his absolute apex as an improviser and as a guitarist. The melodic/rhythmic invention is stunning, and the structural complexity and coherence overall, all done "on the fly" intuitively, put this piece and the Sinister Footwear 3rd mvmt theme in a class of their own. The kinds of things that Frank was able to improvise in that period are the kinds of things I hope I live enough lifetimes to be able to compose - or improvise.
As for not noticing the deception. That was so incredibly weird. I assumed that people would start laughing fairly soon, and that it would be really funny. But no one laughed. Ever. Once I realized that no one was getting it, it was really hard work to get through the rest of it. It was like "Holy shit, I really am on my way to the moon - no going back now". It might have been so easy if people had noticed. But we had to go through the whole experience knowing that they thought we were playing. I've done A LOT of weird things as a performer, but that performance felt REALLY strange. No guilt, I want to say emphatically. I have not one regret about that amazing and wonderful experience that only Frank could provide. What I regret are:

- Not being able to play the piece live, ever.
- No one seeming to appreciate the musical qualities of the piece itself (to some extent I would include Frank in this).
- The fact that the minor scandal that erupted like a pimple on the lower back of contemporary music never managed to generate any serious assessment or discussion of the very real ideas and issue that the "performance" of the piece addressed.

The beta-max tape had not been used because (you guessed it) the tape player was actually a VHS machine. This was not discovered until late in the dress-rehearsal on the day of the concert. A few days later the LA Times published a story about "what really happened". They called up an EAR Unit member (cellist Erika Duke) who had a very contrite attitude about the affair- saying things like "We shouldn't have done this. We'll never do it again." Of course if the paper had interviewed someone else in the ensemble they might have gotten a more positive, tactful answer. And indeed, all the EAR Unit had done was what the composer had requested of them. Frank was amused by the story of what happened in the concert, but he was furious about the subsequent article and Erika's comments. He insisted that all the materials (tapes and music) be returned and that the EAR unit never perform the music again. I personally mark that concert as the beginning of my loss of faith in the chamber-music audience. Here was demonstrable proof that they don't listen and that opinions about performance are made up prior to concerts based on who the composer is and how "important" he is in that small musical sub-culture. Had anyone really been paying attention I firmly believe they would have at least suspected something was not quite right.

AJ

"I personally mark that concert as the beginning of my loss of faith in the chamber-music audience. Here was demonstrable proof that they don't listen and that opinions about performance are made up prior to concerts based on who the composer is and how "important" he is in that small musical sub-culture. Had anyone really been paying attention I firmly believe they would have at least suspected something was not quite right."

I think you have to, in fairness, say exactly the same thing about any audience. There certainly are a lot of people out there who seem to think that Frank's turds were golden. "You sniffed the reeking buns of Angel, and acted like they were cocaine." Frank wrote bad songs, and great ones. He was an amazing improviser, and had off nights. He had incredible gifts, and very real weak spots. In short, he was human. So is his audience, and I don't see them as being, as a group, somehow more critical, astute, or savvy than a classical or contemporary chamber music audience. How many of them laugh when they read about this one incident and say "All right Frank!" and wouldn't have caught on if Frank had lip-synched his last show? Of course we will never know. Would they care? I think Frank asked that question with "While You Were Art", of the Ear Unit's audience on purpose, but also of his own audience by extension.

As a result of this affair there was discussion about Frank doing a benefit concert for the Monday Evening Concerts - he was discussing the possibility of playing some of his Synclavier tapes for a paying audience, with the profits going to MEC. I don't remember if this happened - I don't think so. Frank did tell me that when the director of the concerts, Dorrance Stalvey, visited his studio Frank played the tape of While You Were Art. Frank told me Dorrance said "That's interesting. What is it?"
The final result of all this is very personal for me. Frank told this story in the Real Frank Zappa Book - and it's the one place where my name is mentioned. It says on page 175"Nobody in the audience knew, except for David Ocker, my computer assistant, who had helped prepare the materials. Nobody knew that the musicians never played a note." Okay, so that's my claim to fame - I got mentioned in Frank's Autobiography.
But wait. I recently read an interview Frank did with Digital Audio Magazine in 1984 in which he told the same story. He said "I didn't go to the concert, but a friend of mine did. He said you could hardly make out the music; it was a wall of hiss. Nobody knew that they didn't play a note. Not the man who runs the Monday Evening Concerts, not Morton Subotnick, not either of the reviewers for the Los Angeles Times or the Herald Examiner....". The operative word here, of course, is "friend". Frank Zappa referred to me as "a friend of mine". It's not much, but it's something.

AJ

"Frank Zappa referred to me as "a friend of mine". It's not much, but it's something.
That reminds me of one of the best and most treasured compliments I have ever gotten. After Lorna Eder (nee Little) and Gaylord Mowrey read through some of the piano reductions for Frank, Gail called me at home. She said "Frank will never tell you this himself, but I thought you'd like to know that he's prancing around the house raving about how great the piano reductions are. I've heard the tapes, and I have enough experience with his music by now to know if it's working, and the piano reductions work."
I never saw Frank give anyone strokes. If it was right, that was how it was supposed to be, so let's move on. He would get right down to what was wrong. You had to have your self-confidence intact to work for him.
Which reminds me of David's advice to only tell Frank you can do something if you know you can. When he asked me if I could do a piano reduction I didn't hesitate to say "Sure". Of course, I had never done one before. I don't play piano. I do not compose for the orchestra. I am interested in almost no orchestral music, and therefore almost never listen to it. I have no idea why I thought I could reduce his music to piano, except that I know I write well for the piano and I have a feeling for Frank's stuff. It turns out (maybe David told me this) that Frank was totally taken

aback when he saw what I brought in. The first one I did was Penis Dimension I think. He had meant by "piano reduction" a rehearsal version for dancers and singers, a sketch with the main tunes and harmonies. I though he wanted something that could stand on its own - a real concert piece. So I actually did much more than he had asked for. That's how the whole set of piano reductions came about, when he realized that a big orchestra piece could live on piano alone and still survive musically.

MISCELLANEOUS

A Few Obscure References in the Lyrics to "Yo Cats"

affz -->>
Re: Yo Cats
Below are the lyrics as best as I could get them, with little stars(*) around the four places I just can't decipher (Maybe I got some other things wrong too).
==
DO -->>
I can help with two of the spots by digging into my repertoire of 'studio talk'
==
affz -->>
Get your fiddle, get your bow Play some *cchootballs* on your hole Watch your watch, play a little flat Make the session go overtime, that's where it's at.
==
DO -->>
Play some "footballs" - slang for a "whole note" and by extension an "easy gig" as in "there was nothing to play but footballs". The suggestion that a player would intentionally play badly to send the session into overtime is, um, rather unkind.
==
affz -->> *Your Girl Arlens*, what's the diff
==
DO -->>
"Your Girl" and "Arlyns" were answering services particularly geared to service professional studio musicians - for example, a contractor, wanting to hire a list of people for a date, could simply give the list to the answering service who would then call all the musicians for him - or better yet, the service would keep a copy of the players schedule and accept or deny the job and then inform the player where and when to show up. Staying in close contact with "the service" is important - the contractors won't wait for ever for a reply and calls for last minute jobs can be the most lucrative. Today it's important to bring your cell-phone to a session so you don't have to stand in line at the payphone during a 'ten' in order to 'call the service'.
Picking the 'right' service was very important - I suppose you could lose work if you listed with the 'wrong' service. But I just looked up the phone numbers in the Local 47 AFofM directory to discover that Arlyns seems to have swallowed all the other services. I don't know whether this is a sign of creeping capitalism or of the shrinking studio scene (probably both). In case you want to touch a part of Hollywood studio scene - Arlyn's phone number is 818-766-3851. Don't ask for me, I've never had or needed such a service.

Who was Fulcanelli?

affz -->>
Fulcanelli was the "last of the alchemists" - I believe he was immortal a la Comte St. Germain, and possibly also discovered the philosopher's stone. His true identity is obscure.
affz -->>
There is a little more to this story - Fulcanelli believed that the secrets of Christian hermeticsm were to be found in Bas Reliefs throughout Europe's cathedrals - after he bestowed this knowledge upon a trusted disciple in 1920 (whereupon "Le Mystere des Cathedrales" was published) he disappeared without a trace. Thirty years later he made a single appearance to his disciple, before disappearing again, and, according to his disciple, actually had grown younger by at least 20 years.
DO -->>
I've always wondered who Fulcanelli was since I heard Frank give that name as the answer to the question "Which character from history would you most like to meet." (At the time I wrote the name down on a post-it note so I wouldn't forget and the post it note still lives in my desk drawer). I don't presume to understand either of the above explanations or whether they might contradict one another or not.

Marine Creatures Named after Frank Zappa

BL -->>
Any truth to the rumor about a marine species being named after Frank?
==
DO -->>
On one visit to the Zappa household I noticed a small frame sitting on the downstairs fireplace mantle. It was a biological description of a newly discovered species of marine animal which some fan had named after Frank and then sent the description to him. If I were left to my own devices, this is *all* I'd remember about this little beastie - but this was the one time I was there with my wife who just happens to be a biologist - actually she's a Polychaetologist, also known as a Marine Invertebrate Taxonomist (huh? - er, well - she spends her time identifying and naming little critters from the ocean - her specialty is Polychaetes - sea worms).
She says this named-after-Zappa-creature was in the family Coelenterata which is also called Cnidaria (the "C" in "Cnidaria" is Csilent, in case you're wondering) - which means it is some sort of sea anemone or jelly fish.
This visit would have happened in 1991 - I think - around the time of the very first Yellow Shark rehearsals. Leslie claims she looked up the critter where such things get published and even xeroxed the reference for me - but I don't remember that at all. She said she'd look it up again when she gets the chance - but given her work load right now she might not be able to get that chance for a while.
So, I thought, I'll post this - maybe some zoologists read this group - possibly even the person who named that animal after Frank in the first place - and they can provide some more information. (**DO's note:** This did happen - and Onno Gross provided the rest of the story:
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OG>
I was recently reading the mail by David Ocker, Los Angeles, on the naming of a marine creature named after Zappafrank.

Later following happened: A scientist colleg from Vienna, Michael Stachowitch, was visiting and by talking it turned out he is a Zappa-freak as well. It came to the point that he knew the man who had named the sea species after Frank and who also send a photo to Frankies home: it was Frank Boero, who as a scientist was working at that time in California. Michael told me that Frank was known to hardly miss ever any FZ concert. He published his work:
F. Boero (1987): Life cycles of Phialella zappai n. sp., Phialella fragilis and Phialella sp. (Cnidaria, Leptomedusae, Phialellidae) from Central California. - Journal of Natural Histors, 21, 465-480. and it says in the ending: "I have the pleasure in naming this species after the modern music composer Francis (Frank) Vincent Zappa.
I have a copy of his nice work on the new marine hydrozoan P. zappai and if your are interested send me an e-mail or directly contact Frank. His snail-mail address is: F.Boero Dept. di Biologia Univerita degli Studi di Lecce Via Provile Lecce-Monteroni 73100 Lecce, ITALIA
editor note: This was recently received from Francesco Gentile regarding the 6/9/88 Jelly Fish show from Genoa. It was printed in Italian in Debra Kadabra, an excellent Italian FZ Fan Magazine.
>
The double issue 14-15 of Debra Kadabra, the Italian fzine published by the Italian FZ Research Kitchen also called DK, will include the true story of "Lonsome Cowboy Nando". Nando is Fernando ("all my friends they call me DO" ... "Nan-Nan-Nan DO-DO-DO") Boero, a marine biologyst from Genoa, they Italian city where the 88 part of "Lonsome Cowboy Nando" was recorded. Nando wrote for us the story of his friendship with FZ, it's a very nice story, I hope I'll find someone from affz that will want to translate it in English. Meanwhile here is a rough translation of the begining of the article:
"There is nothing I'd like better than having a jellyfish named after me" (FZ).
In 1982, after becoming a researcher in the University of Genoa, I asked for a work fund that could allow me to be for a long time in the Bodega Marine Laboratory of the University of California, Berkeley. The purpose was to study the taxonomy and the ecology of the local jellyfish fauna (yes, there exist people who earn a living studing jellyfish). Actually the true purpose was another one: to meet Frank Zappa. My strategy was a simple one:
- that fauna was (and is) not well known; - I would find some new species for sure; - once I have found them I would have to give them a name; - I would dedicate one of them to FZ; - I would tell him about it; - He would invite me for a visit.
And that's how it went.

Zappa Family Pets

BL -->>
You also talked about the Zappa family dog on affz. What's the story of her name?
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DO -->> I used to think that dog was named "Doggus" but I eventually learned her name is "Doggess" - you know - a girl dog. When she was a puppy she was super cute and friendly. She grew up to be a BIG dog.
The LA Times runs a comic strip called Ballard Street by Jerry Van Armerongen - the dog in that comic looks just like Doggess - huge body, little spindly legs. Frank also had a pet cat when I first went to work for him - I remember someone said that it was specifically "Frank's cat". The cat was a Siamese named Gorgo - whose tail had been broken in a number of places. It was old and feisty and I remember it curling up on amplifiers in the basement - probably to get warm.

Cigarettes

affz -->>
Here's a trivial yet curious question for you, David. How did Frank acquire his cigarettes? Did he buy them by the carton, by the case? Did he have a gopher at UMRK that would run and get the pizza, wings, butts, whatever? Did Gail stock up on them for him? Also, how many packs a day would he smoke?
==
DO -->>
The only question I can answer with any certainty here is that when I worked for Frank there was a gofer on staff - his name was Thomas Nordegg and he did lots and lots of different stuff - riding around town on a motor scooter! I assume fetching cigarettes was well within his job description. If you think of things in commercial terms, Frank was not only the CEO of the family business but also the source of all the raw material for the product. Other people were there to handle the details. Picking up cigarettes was way, way down the list of things Frank would ever attend to. Things were structured so that Frank could produce as much music as possible. As for how much he smoked, I can't say - my *opinion* would be that he smoked a lot. The studio maintenance person told me once that he had to change air filters much more frequently when Frank was there than when Frank was on tour. The studio was well air-conditioned (to my body "freezing" would not be a bad description) and well-ventilated so one never noticed smoke in the air.
Before the studio existed I remember sitting with Frank in front of a fireplace which contained a pile of sand and into which Frank threw his cigarette butts. The same fireplace where the picture of P.Zappai was. This was in a part of the house where Frank was working (editing film - Baby Snakes - I think) and he spent a lot of time there. I turned around and saw hundreds (maybe thousands) of butts in the fireplace. I made a comment about them and Frank replied "Hey, it's my life."
Just take that as a sign that Frank was aware of the risks of smoking. I do NOT want to start more discussion on the effects of smoking on Frank's illness or as a comment about his opinions on drug use.
More from Art Jarniven:

Some additional thoughts from Art Jarvinen

AJ
TOPIC *- Miscellaneous*
I value the little bits of Frank's time and energy that he gave me. I learned a hell of a lot from him - more than from anyone else I can think of. I realize that, even though I didn't play in the band, I saw things, heard things, know things, that contribute to a clearer understanding of who Frank the Composer was. I don't know the name of the guy who fetched his cigarettes - sorry - but he explained his ideas about how the "tuplets" in his pieces should be played - "Like odd meters, but without the underlying (big) pulse changing" (which explains why the beams are divided the way they are; is it a 2+2+3 seven or a 3+2+2?) - and that was interesting and important to me as a musician, not just as a copyist. So maybe I should say this stuff for other musicians to hear. I think it bears on more than Frank's music alone. David Harrington was quoted in an interview as saying something like "More musicians should play Zappa. It will improve their Haydn".
As for names:

John Bergamo was Ed Mann's percussion teacher at Cal Arts. Still teaches there. He played on The Black Page, and other FZ tracks. You'd have to ask him what all he was on, but he was responsible for opening the door for Ed to audition, and the rest is history. John's bio always includes that he played in the Abnuceals Emuukha etc (I'm not going to look up the spelling right now), so he might have some info about personnel on various projects.

The Antenna Repairmen is a percussion trio that I started while a student at CalArts in 1978. We still exist, but we hardly ever play anywhere. We have a CD that was released in 1997, called Ghatam, on the M.A Recordings label. The other two guys are M.B. Gordy, who is a freelance percussionist here in L.A. (and tours with John Tesh!), and Bob Fernandez, also a freelancer, who put in 3 years on the road with Barry Manilow! Bob did a solo concert in Buffalo once, on which he played the Theme from the 3rd Movement of Sinister Footwear. Coincidentally, FZ was playing in Buffalo at the same time.

Here's another tidbit, of no particular relevance, but just something I remember. I went to the studio for something, and a guy was there demo-ing Simmons Electronic Drums. This was when all this kind of stuff (i.e.,electronic percussion) that's common-place now was just becoming sort of realistic. I thought Simmons drums sucked (still do). This poor guy was trying so hard to get the snare drum component to sound like anything other than a total piece of shit. It just wasn't working right. He was explaining strenuously that it was actually really good, and could do all this great stuff. The problem was that he wasn't really the tech guy, just a salesman, and didn't know all the details about how to work it. I had to wonder why the Simmons people would send a technically unqualified salesman to demo their product to Frank Zappa, of all people. But he was being very patient. He knew I was a drummer, so he had me play for a while. He said "What do you think?" I said "Real futuristic. I dig the fins." I don't think he ever bought a set of Simmons. But he was definitely interested in that kind of stuff, and the possibilities. He showed me his Linn Drum machine when he first got it, and he was like a kid, bubbling with enthusiasm. He had me punch is some tracks, too. I remember telling him that I thought his audience came to hear him and his band PLAY, and that most people don't want to pay 15 bucks a ticket to hear drum machines. He said "I think they do".

Thanks David and Art!

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http://mixonline.com/mag/audio_complete_mark_pinski/index1.html

The Complete Mark Pinske Interview by Chris Michie

DAY ONE

Pinske: Where I'm from originally? Where I was born? I was born in Arlington, Minnesota.

Mix: Are the Pinskes a family from there?
Pinske: It's a German name. I was born and raised in Minnesota, basically. Moved to Florida to go to college. And from Florida went out to California, which is where I started the trek on everything, there.

Mix: How did you get into audio? Were you doing audio in college?
Pinske: Actually, yeah. I kind of did it on the side as I was in college. I actually played in some groups, some music bands, and started doing sound and live sound. I kind of got to be the guy in Gainesville, Florida. When I got there, I kind of got to be the guy that made the demo tapes for people. I started getting interested in it, and I had a little 2-channel Revox recorder, and mics and stuff. I made lots of demos for little bands around town, plus went out and did sound. Kind of took it on as a hobby at that point, while I was in college.

Mix: What were you doing in college?
Pinske: I started studying for architectural acoustics, and then I went into electrical engineering. I got a degree in electrical engineering. A BSEE degree. I came out of college, took one of the first jobs I could, designing power lines and stuff. Went out on the road with some of the P.A. companies, Clair Brothers and Showco. I worked for Maryland Sound. Did a lot of touring.

Mix: What year is this?
Pinske: That would have been '76, around 1974-76.

Mix: So this is a time when those companies you just named were pretty established. The whole touring industry was-
Pinske: Oh yeah. I did a lot of different things. I did B.B. King, I did sound for Weather Report. I did some of the Broadway show plays that would come through. I did some of those-"Jesus Christ, Superstar" for a short spell.

Mix: Mixing front of house?
Pinske: This is all front of house. Just front-of-house mixing.

Mix: Not many people had monitor mixers then.
Pinske: I did Melissa Manchester. Had a lot of live experience. I decided that there was not a lot of credits there, and if I wanted to get a little bit better known, I needed to do recording. I went out to Los Angeles. I actually took a job for a manufacturer out there, just to get me out there, which was Quad Eight Electronics, and I was working there as an engineer. Designing film consoles. That's when I managed to get an audition set up to audition for Frank Zappa.

Mix: I know quite a bit about the musician's auditions, because there's a bunch of stuff on the Internet about interviews with them, but I never heard that he also auditioned engineers.
Pinske: Absolutely. It was a little tough, because originally, he'd just built the studio.

Mix: And this was a high-end home studio?
Pinske: It was a $3.5 million studio he built at his house up on Woodrow Wilson Drive, up in the Hollywood Hills. Very elaborate studio. It was designed by Rudy Brewer, originally. It had a huge 48-track setup of a Harrison console. And when I auditioned, he was just finishing up the studio. A guy named David Gray, who works with Dolby now, was there, pretty much putting in some of these elaborate systems. I remember when I did the audition, what he did was he auditioned each engineer for about one day in the studio, and then you'd go down to a sound stage, and he would see how you would do live, and had you put some stuff on tape. So one of the first things that happened to me with Frank-it was a similar thing. I got there, he asked me to put his guitar through a whole bunch of stuff. There was a new console without patchbay that wasn't even labeled, and I was patching around, and he said something to me like-this is one of the things I'll never forget-he said, "I'm not a robot, you know. I can only stay interested in these things for mere moments." And I was just taking a little tone generator and patch it around to see what would light up. Later on, it was kind of interesting. I thought, "Oh, man. I'll never get this job. This guy's too quick." So I did some stuff for him, mixed it on tape.

The next day, went down to a sound stage where he had everything set up. He was getting ready to do a tour. They had all brand-new Midas consoles, the kind with--the brand-new line of Midas that was out there. He had a guy kind of mess them all up. Said, "OK, make it sound good." And he walked around with his wireless guitar. Then he had me put the stuff on a cassette, while we were doing it. And he said he was going to take that tape and the tape in the studio and he'd get back to me in about two weeks. Well, two weeks went by, and I didn't hear anything, so I figured, oh well, I didn't get that gig. And all of a sudden I'm in my office at Quad 8 and the phone. Honest to God truth, this is so funny. The phone rings and he says, "You ready to go?" He didn't say who he was, he just said, "Are you ready to go?" And I just said, for lack of thinking what else to say, I just said, "Well, the car's running." "The motor's running." I said something like that. And I had been at this place for almost three years. Actually, it was a little over three years I was there. So I just pretty much accepted the gig. I cut a deal with him that I would fly with the band. Because I told him I had done too much road traveling, and I really didn't want to be on the bus smelling dirty socks again. And I really wanted to concentrate on doing a better job, and he said, "OK," so we went along with that setup.

So I started off with him. We went out, got ready for that tour. We did live tours. This would be-that was the fall of '79, so 1980 and the beginning of '81, we did some live tours before we built the recording truck. So I did all front of house then. Then we did a couple of remotes as we were on tour.

Mix: Were you recording to 4-track or something, while you were doing front of house?
Pinske: We did some recording to 8-track. We rented a recording truck a couple of nights. We kept an 8-track and a 4-track, and we had a little Soundcraft 1-inch 8-track that we were running some tapes. But we didn't tape all the time. We just taped some shows. I mainly did house mix, and then when we got back in the studio, after the tour, we started working on studio albums, and then putting together tapes from some live tapes that he had previous to before when I was there. When Kerry McNab, Joe Chicarelli, Davey Moire,

some of the guys that were there just before me. They had a collection of all kinds of tapes.

And Frank pretty much wanted to spend all his time, and now that he had his own studio, he pretty much wanted to work around the clock. That's when we got the idea that when we were going to go out on the '81 tours-we'd just finished up-we'd put together "Tinsel Town Rebellion" album. That's the first full live collaboration I did with him. You'll see a lot of engineers credited on there. My name's the first name, and then there's a bunch of other ones of people who did a lot of the tapes-the collections of tapes-and it was a double album. And then we did the studio album, "You Are What You Is," which is pretty much an all-in-the-studio album. Which is pretty much all my baby. I even did some vocals on that one. That was pretty funny.

But when we finished that up, we started moving into, "well, what can we do to have a better situation live?" That's when I decided that we could build a recording truck. And that's where the Utility Muffin Research Kitchen recording truck was pretty much born. I bought-the shell of the truck I bought from the Beach Boys. They had this sitting up in the backyard of their house. They hadn't been using it so much. So I took the shell of the truck-it was a 27-foot trailer. We pretty much had to redo everything in it. Added a new hydraulic airbag, shocks, and all that kind of stuff. It was a little bit beaten up. But the inside of it was still pretty good shape. We took a Neve-had a Neve 8108 on the front of it. We wired it up for an elaborate amount of inputs, because I didn't want to have to be somewhat in a tour, have some bad channels, and stop and do repairs, and stuff like that. So we kind of did an overkill on all that.

Mix: You wired it up for extra channels?
Pinske: Right. I had 142-channel ins. Three 24-track machines, and four videos.

Mix: Video recorders?
Pinske: Right. And we had a Neve 8108 across the front. Then we had a custom made Midas made for us by Midas, that went down along the wall, which is pretty much normal the first hundred channels. Now we also did an endorsement with Carvin, which adds a couple extra boards, but normally we would use like 96 channels live. We would put everything on its own channel. All the channels that were over the 96 that we used were pretty much all spare channels. So we did a little endorsement, we took a little picture of the truck and put a couple little Carvin boards up on the wall for anything that was over Channel 100. And Frank stood there and took a little picture and they recycled that thing, and we were able to get some free equipment out of it and all that kind of stuff.

Mix: It doesn't sound as though you used it as primary mixers.
Pinske: No, no. They were just there for-what happened was, we took that picture, and we got extra keyboards and amplifiers. The keyboard players on stage would use some of the Carvin mixers for their keyboard rigs on stage left and stage right. We had Tommy Mars at that time.

Mix: Peter Wolf?
Pinske: This was just after Peter Wolf. I came in right at the end of Peter Wolf. Before we did the recording-truck stuff, it was all Tommy Mars and Bobby Martin. Bob Harris. Ed Mann came back around.

Mix: For that "Tinsel Town Rebellion," Steve Vai was the guitar player, right?
Pinske: Steve didn't really come in 'til a little later.

Mix: I don't know my history as well as I should.
Pinske: That was mainly a collection of a lot of live stuff. Steve came in a little later. Steve was a whole interesting story all of his own, to tell you the truth. We auditioned him. He was a kid that was going to Berkeley that charted out some of the music for Frank. And he had a number of different people all over the country that he would take our cassettes and send them to, and they would chart out the sheets and send us back to them. And Steve was one of those kids that did an immaculate job on charting out the sheets. And one day Frank said, "I'm flying him out here." And I'm thinking, "What the heck's he flying out another guitar player for?" So that's how Steve's audition happened. He was like 19, 18 years old then. Just turning 19. That whole band, when we got Chad Wackerman, after Vinnie Colaiuta had left, we auditioned like, gee whiz, I think it was somewhere like about 31 drummers or something. A huge amount of drummers. We had trouble trying to replace Vinnie, because Vinnie was really good. We ended up with Chad Wackerman, who was 21 years old. Then we had Steve Vai, who came in at 20. And we had Scott Thunes on bass who was 21 years old. They were all young guys that had come in, that had pretty much won the auditions. So that's when we had the younger set coming in.

Mix: Between Vinnie and Chad, there's a drummer called David Logeman.
Pinske: David Logeman played on the "You Are What You Is" album. He was pretty much a studio drummer, but we did do a live tour. We did a short American tour that David Logeman was on as well. He wasn't with us overseas, I don't think. Maybe he was, for one of our short overseas stints. But David Logeman was with us for a pretty good while in between there, too.

Mix: You were talking about getting the truck together and going-you actually had three 24-track recorders running simultaneously?
Pinske: We overlapped the tapes. Originally we started off analog 2-inch tape, at 30 ips. We ran two Ampex MM1200s. And I had a 3M M79 machine in the back. The one in the back was primarily a spare. So what we did is, we took the 24 buses that we ran, and we overlapped the tapes by about a minute or two minutes, so that we could always edit them all together later. I tried to make as many big reels as I could, 14-inch reels. Normally, we just took out of the box, reels, ran them, started this next machine one minute before the other one would run out, and we just kept altering the machines as the night went on. And that way everything got caught on tape.

Mix: So 30 ips?
Pinske: 30 ips, yep.

Mix: Non-Dolby?
Pinske: Non-Dolby.

Mix: How many reels would you go through? How long were the shows, at this point? Did he play with an opening act?
Pinske: On the first three-months tour, we had 946 master tapes, if I remember correctly. I can almost remember the number. A huge amount of master reels of tape. Matter of fact, we did use Dolby on some channels, but most of the time we didn't use Dolby. He hated Dolby on the cymbals and stuff. I'm trying to remember how many reels we had on an average-normally it would take about eight reels a show, overlapping them. Somewhere along that, depending how long the set was. A lot of times we did these small theaters in America. We did like the Fox theaters, the Palladiums, those kind of places, so we would do double shows. And that way we would record two whole shows, and Frank had a habit

of not repeating any of the songs from the second show to the first show, so we'd have pretty much different tunes through both shows.

Mix: What date are we at, with the beginning of the truck, when you got it from the Beach Boys?
Pinske: I built the truck in the spring of 1981. That's when the very first tour it went on, I guess would be in-- the first tour we did in 1981, and then we recorded-it pretty much went on every tour after that. We took it overseas. We put it on the Queen Mary, and we shipped it across to-we rehearsed originally over in Denmark, or Amsterdam. We took it all around Europe. We recorded all of Europe on the truck as well.

Mix: Presumably there was a driver. If you're traveling with the band, and also presumably at some point you stopped doing front of house and you started working the truck.

Pinske: Yeah. At that point, in 1981, is when we went through about two or three different house mixers. Bob Stone came on board a little later. He did some house mixes. We had a couple of guys-one guy, Chris that was with us for a while. Mike Abbott. We called him Rat Man. We had a variety of different house mixers. We had Marque Coy doing the monitors. It was a real elaborate set up. What we did was, I used to do some of the submixing from the truck. We had that, like I said, 142-channel snake, but 30 of them were like direct lines. So I could take an individual input, for instance, on all the drums. I could have 22 channels on the drums. We'd have Syndrums or Simmons drums, or a combination of a whole set. We'd have a lot of individual direct mics inside. I would take the combination of all of it, and send, for instance, tom-toms left and right back out to the house. The house would have it's own kick, it's own snare, it's left and right toms, left and right overhead cymbals and the separate hi-hat, whatever. And I would take things like that on the keyboards, as well. We might take nine different stereo keyboards, and I would mix them all down to a stereo keyboard mix. And the stereo keyboard mix could go back to the monitors onstage, and back to the house mix. What we found by doing that is we had a lot more control over the feedback, and we had a lot less problems with the recordings because we had the same sonic tone, and the same path pretty much going to each of the locations.

Mix: Then the truck was an integral part of the whole P.A. setup.
Pinske: Absolutely. That's one of the reasons we used it all the time. Because I had 85 noise gates in the truck, and we could pretty much really, really control everything. And I could solo stuff up up there. It was really brilliant because we could solo stuff up and I could hear problems, like little buzzes or hums or something like that. We could isolate the problems, and I could treat them with some of the best outboard gear you could get, and send it back to these guys and it would be all spiced up. And of course, you're not going to get the kind of equalization that you have in a Neve console out of a little portable Midas board.

Mix: So you were contracting with different P.A. companies in America and Europe.
Pinske: With me personally, or with the Zappa tour?

Mix: With Zappa.
Pinske: With Zappa we owned our own P.A. We bought the John Meyer system.

Mix: Which one? A JM-3 system, or an earlier . . .
Pinske: Yeah. We had the very first M-3 system that he made.

Mix: The MSL-3s?
Pinske: Yeah. We took it all over the whole-we bought that system from John. In fact, that was the first one he made, and I even helped John out with a couple of problems. He had a couple of microprocessor problems in the first ML-3. The microprocessors had a little bit of a problem, and we ended up having a little problem more on a couple of the horn things. But after that-that was just a PC board problem. Once that got fixed, we never had any problems with the stuff. It was fabulous. We had A and B amplifiers, a full spread of his stuff. Took it all around the world.

Mix: At this point, you would have been just stacking at the side of the stage, rather than flying it?
Pinske: We flew it. We flew it as much as possible. But in America, most of the time, as you know, there may have been only room to fly a center cluster or something. And some of these small theaters, we'd stack it, right. We had to stack it on the side of the stage. But when we went over to Europe, it was all bigger places. And when we'd play something like Madison Square Garden, for instance, in New York, then we would hire Audio Analysts to come in as a back up system. And we would tie in with them. We'd do our time alignment, and use them for support, so that we could carry those huge, huge venues.

Mix: It sounds to me as though, by the time you joined the Zappa organization, pretty much all the equipment was owned or bought for the tour.

Pinske: Oh yeah. That's the way he did things. We owned all the sound and all the stage. What we would do with the lights, though, we would buy a system from LSD Lighting, we would use it for three months and then sell it back to them. And he would hire three guys on the crew for the lights. He did that instead of renting the lights. And he had a-Frank was a pretty smart businessman. By the time we would finish a tour, we would actually save a lot of money by buying the system and just paying for the crew to run it, than we did-especially on lights, because light rentals were so expensive. So he would do things like that all the time.

Mix: And obviously you owned the recording truck. Did you buy buses as well? I'm just curious about the evolution of the touring business, as he did it.
Pinske: As far as the methods he used?
Mix: . . . Never mind. . . . The first thing you did was mixes for "Tinsel Town Rebellion." And then a studio album, "You Are What You Is." And then you were out on tour for the rest of '81 with this new truck.

Pinske: No, we didn't go on tour the rest of '81. We did recording in the studio in between, as well. Every time we came back-like we did an American tour for three months, then we went in the studio, then we went in Europe. Then we came back and went in the studio. Every time we were off the road, we were back in the studio. So we were putting together a whole bunch of different albums. We did the "Ship Arriving Too Late to Save the Drowning Witch," which was the whole "Valley Girl" thing. We did the "Them or Us" album. We did "Man From Utopia." We just kept putting albums together, one right after the other. A whole slew of them. Then we did a bunch of guitar albums, based off the live stuff that we found. "Shut Up 'n Play Your Guitar" instrumental stuff. We just kept, all the time, trying to get as much product as we possibly could. The cool thing about doing the truck was, we came back and we had all these tapes that we could listen to, and then we could sort out good performances live, and edit together sections of a song. That's when we started putting together the Mammy Nun escapade, which was a six-sided-was originally going to be a six-sided album Broadway-play-type thing.

Mix: Oh, the "Thing-Fish?"
Pinske: The "Thing-Fish," right. "Thing-Fish" was the actual title of it. It was a six-sided album. That was basically done off of all live recordings I had made in the truck. But then we overdubbed some different lyrics and different vocals and stuff in the studio. So that was kind of interesting, because we had enough isolation. As a matter of fact, the whole thing starts out, the whole "Thing-Fish" album starts out with the song "The Mammy Nuns," and it's a guitar that Frank had during a soundcheck in the Sportehalle in Vienna. Which is this huge place that if you drop a chair, it would last for eight seconds. He did a little guitar segment during rehearsal. And Frank used to love the sound of the room when it was empty, when there were no people in it. And I had PCM microphones up on the stage, facing out toward where the audience would be, so you would hear the whole room. And he started a little guitar thing and put it in a loop, and set it down, and it was just looping. The whole start of that album is basically that live track of him just playing it during the sound check, which is how the album started out. We started doing things like that. We started recording things during sound checks just for the, "OK, let's put this down on tape and then later on maybe we'll use it on something." That got to be a lot of fun, because that's when we started experimenting with taking live stuff, segueing it into whatever we did in the studio, spicing stuff in the studio, and back and forth. And doing edits and cuts to other live shows.

Mix: I'm not sure where I read it, but I think one interview I read, I guess with a musician, said that some of the basic tracks which appear on the album as maybe four songs in a row where they segue, or they seem like they're hard edits, in fact they were recorded as tracks the way you hear them.
Pinske: As a matter of fact, he segued almost everything live. He would always segue the songs, and he would give it a little-you know how Frank directed on stage. He had these little signs that he would do. He would pull his hair and they would go into a reggae temp, or hit his forehead and they'd go into a New Wave or a punk tempo. And he would always direct a downbeat on the end of a song which would go right into the next song. So a lot of those segues were actually just the way they were performed. A lot of times we would use those segues as a place to edit. We would come from the Hammersmith Odeon in London to maybe Frankfort, and come back to the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium. And the same song might travel through a number of different shows. Which was unbelievable, because that meant that the tempos had to be right, everybody had to be in tune. He was really hard on everybody when it came to that. The musicians were nothing but top notch when it came to that stuff.

Mix: This must have taken a lot of work every day, in terms of sound check and setup. Was there a schedule, or did it depend on the traveling?
Pinske: Every day, I had a guy, Tom Ehle, who works with Dolby now also, who aligned all the machines in the truck for me. I would come in with the band, we would do a sound check. Sometimes we would lay some stuff down on tape. Normally do a sound check to make sure the house and the monitoring system and everything was all in sync. A lot of times the recording truck wasn't too far off, because the Neve and everything had pretty much detented settings. Because we had the same microphone built inside the drums. We worked with John Goode, who is the vice president of DW Drums, him and I developed a system with Randy May, May Systems now is a pretty well-known drum-type mic setup. We developed a system. John and I worked with Chad Wackerman, and also with Sugarfoot, with the "Thriller" tour, developing this thing. We used mics that were built inside the drums. We tuned the drums exactly the same every day. John would put new heads on, between the soundcheck and the show. We used little Teflon nuts that would not slip, to make sure that everything stayed in tune as well as possible. We did an

elaborate setup with the drums, but normally the mics and the direct pickups and everything on the stage were identical. So we didn't have to change a whole lot in the truck, because the Neve had detented settings. So everything was repeatable. It really didn't change too much from day to day as far as what we had. It was a matter of fine-tuning it, and bringing the room into control. We might voice the room a little bit differently because of the acoustics of it, or the size of it. We'd make sure that the monitors were not conflicting with what was going on with the truck.

The stereo side mixes for Frank-he would have sidefills as well as his footfills. And the sidefills-I did a mix from the truck that went to his sidefills. So he could hear the whole band a little bit coming through the sidefills, which were some more Meyer MSL-3s. There was two of them on each side on stands, facing him in the middle, and I would do a little stereo mix that went to him there. And then Marque Coy, who was the monitor mixer, would have the overall volume control over it. That way he could get kind of an idea of what the whole band was sounding like in a little bit more of a high-fidelity situation than what was going on in the truck. It just gave him a better feel.

Mix: He had a quite elaborate guitar-I know it was at least stereo. Did he have more than two cabinets?
Pinske: Absolutely. We tracked five channels of guitar on every show. He had a rack, a double rack, which he called "the blue box for bimbos," which is pretty well known over the years. It had everything from the cheap Electro-Harmonix Big Muff on up into it. Almost any kind of guitar gimmick you could ever imagine. He had what was called a "dirty" setup and "clean" setup. And both the dirty and the cleans were in stereo. So if he hit on a switch and went to his Marshalls, or in this case with the Carvin versions of the Marshalls, that drove his Marshall cabinets, he'd play his powerful distorted setup. Do whatever effects he'd have on in the rack. And then there was another switch that hit him through a clean setup, which went through Crown DC300 power amps, into a real clean, elaborate speaker system. It even had an 18-inch speaker. It was just real powerful and real clean sounding. So what I did, was I would stereo mic both sets, the clean amplifier in stereo, the dirty amplifier in stereo, and they would take up four tracks on the multitrack. The fifth track was used for a direct out. He had a wireless coming from his guitar, and we went through a Vega wireless system, and I took the wireless direct and went right directly onto tape. This way, if the amplifiers screwed up during the show, we could take the direct channel, put it through amplifiers in the studio, which we did a lot anyway. We would take the direct signal, put it through amps in the studio, and maybe mess with it while we were mixing. Because he usually didn't like playing again in the studio. We would take a live solo, and then we might enhance the recording with putting a couple Marshalls in the reverb chamber or something like that, miking them up. And we could use that direct signal to just kind of recreate what we did on the live stage.

Mix: But presumably on the live albums, including all the guitar albums, the guitar tone you hear is what he was getting on stage at the time.
Pinske: Absolutely. With a few exceptions. Like when we did "Coneheads," for instance. The "Saturday Night Live" thing. I got him to do a real elaborate solo on that thing in the studio, which was just an all-studio solo overdub. But most of the time Frank used to like to use the live-whatever live show he felt was the best solo.

Mix: I've read quite a lot about it, but actually this is one of the few albums I don't yet have. Apparently all the guitar solos on "Joe's Garage" were actually live solos flown in over tracks.

Pinske: Absolutely. They were live solos. A lot of them were flown in over tracks. Some of them were taken from different shows.

Mix: But that was the album that came out before you started working with Frank.
Pinske: The end of "Joe's Garage," I was actually still working on. But Joe Chicarelli was the engineer. In fact, Joe Chicarelli had quit at that point, or gotten fired or something. So I kind of had to finish that up. That album wasn't really one of my albums. I'm not credited on it, but I did some work on the end of it. That was kind of my apprenticeship, so to speak. The real first album I did was the "Tinsel Town Rebellion" album, as far as having credits on it and doing all the work myself. That's where we started on it. We've continued to do those same tactics. For instance, we would do something like "What's New in Baltimore" from Hamburg, and then we would cut away to the 2-inch tape from the Hammersmith Odeon because Frank loved the way the guitar sounded in that theater. And then we would edit that solo in, and then come back after the solo and go to some other city. Maybe to Baltimore, or the Tower Theater in Philadelphia, or something like that. We would edit around all the time between live things. We would listen to solos, probably until we were totally sick of it. There's not many master tapes.

Mix: I was going to say, you presumably logged the tapes during each show, but did you make comments? Did Frank keep a log of what were good shows? Or did he just keep it all in his head, or did you listen to it all back again later?
Pinske: We both had our ideas which shows were the best. When we came back off the road, we did all kinds of exercises. Because Frank would sometimes get mad at the band when they'd make mistakes. So he'd come back and he'd write a little list and say, "Gee, I can't wait to listen to this show or that show." So we might listen to Paris, or we might listen to his favorite show. He would say, "What shows do you think were good?" We'd listen to some of my shows, the ones I had good recording nights on. And then we'd try to evaluate the performance of the bands. But Frank was always one of these kind of guys that would always try something-if something wasn't working, he'd say, "Well, let's try something stupid." He said, "What were the worst nights we co

DAY TWO

Mix: If I ask you a question about a record that you had nothing to do with, please correct me. Also, if you recorded tracks for an album, but didn't mix it, let me know that. I've found that the CD booklets often don't include proper engineering credits, at least for the studio albums. So just bear that in mind, that I'm not working from a full set of data.
Pinske: That's fine. Bob Stone and I did a lot of tag-team shifts on mixing. Bob never really did any of the tracking. Bob Stone was an engineer we brought in because what had happened was, I started putting in about 113-hour weeks. Frank and I were just - he's cranking almost every waking minute. A lot of times we'd be under deadlines, like a three-month deadline in between the tours or something, and we had a deadline to get an album out. And I would start a mix - we literally got it down to where I would start a mix, maybe halfway through a song. Sometimes we would mix segments of songs, and Bob would come in and take over the mix, or I would mix a song and he would mix a song. So most of his credits were pretty much just "remix engineer." Which is what he did. He would mix the stuff that I didn't mix. But the majority of the albums - probably a half-dozen or so albums that Bob and I did together were collaborative. On "Thing-Fish," I probably mixed the majority of the tunes. He mixed about a half-dozen of them or so.

Mix: That's good to know. What's happened - I don't know if you're aware of this, but when the whole catalog got reissued on CD, I think it's been reissued a couple of times, but anyway, the most recent, the supposedly approved versions, have restored artwork and new timing sheets -
Pinske: Are you talking about the Rykodisc stuff?

Mix: Yeah.
Pinske: Yeah. Some of that stuff got redone pretty badly.

Mix: OK. We can get to that. I'm going back into ancient history, here. I just wanted to clear up, before working for Frank, what were you doing for Quad Eight? Did you install and test out Quad Eights around Hollywood and elsewhere, or were you more of a bench-tech guy at the factory?
Pinske: I had a multiple number of roles when I was at Quad Eight Electronics. I started out there as an engineer on staff, and I worked my way up to - I was national sales manager, and I went from national sales manager to plant superintendent. Quad Eight had a couple different divisions. It was a pretty large manufacturer. We did a whole side that did nothing but custom film consoles for Burbank and Universal, all kinds of different film studios out in Hollywood. And they were just custom film consoles. We also had another building where we started a commercial line of recording consoles. So there was a whole nother building, a whole nother manufacturing inside that started up that did a regular slew of products. Quad Eight actually, I don't know if you know this or not, but they actually came out with the very first digital reverb that was ever done.

Mix: I didn't know that.
Pinske: Yeah. They had the very first digital reverb. So I was the plant superintendent of the manufacturing plant that did all the commercial products. The was the job I had at the time I auditioned for Frank. The last job I had. There was about 45 people working under me. I had research and development. One of the guys who actually invented the digital reverb stuff, a guy named James Ketchum, who now has DTS systems, which is another film thing, he was one of the guys that was in the research department that worked under me. It was quite an interesting adventure there. That's where I got most of my manufacturing background. Which is more of what I'm into now.

Mix: How did you hear about the audition, and why did you give up this excellent job to go and work with Frank?
Pinske: That's kind of an interesting question, because some of my friends thought I was crazy to give up the job I had, which was a really good-paying job. But, initially, one of the main reasons I went out to Hollywood in the first place was to try to do studio recordings. Like I told you before, I had recorded a lot, most of my life, on the side, and then I did all this live touring. I had pretty much come to the realization that in live touring you never get credits. You don't get album credits or anything. So I thought, if I wanted to benefit my career, and get ahead in my career, that I needed to do some serious work that would have the credibility, that would get on albums, and this kind of thing. So this was the reason - at least I thought at the time - the reason I was coming out to L.A. So I took the job there as a stepping stone, so I could have employment and be working in L.A., and try to look for some of the other stuff on the side. When I got involved with that company, it became real serious. I really enjoyed it. I was still pretty young, yet. I still wanted to do some more touring and do some recording and stuff. So when the audition opportunity came up for Frank, one of the engineers that had worked for me, that had worked at Quad Eight, had heard about it, and made a couple phone calls and got beyond the list, along

with a number of other musicians that were doing auditions. So it was really just a straightforward thing. I went up there, not really knowing any of them at all.

Mix: When Frank Zappa auditioned you for a position as recording engineer and live sound front-of-house mixer, was the UMRK facility fully functional? Or was part of your audition to actually make it work?
Pinske: That's exactly what's happening. It was actually December of 1979, and he was finishing up construction on the studio. The Harrison board had been put in. David Gray, who's now the - I think he's Vice President of Dolby, was the technical engineer up there. He was the guy that was doing all the wiring and installing everything, and pretty much was with Frank Zappa for a number of years. After I'd gotten hired, he was the assistant there. He moved off to Dolby shortly after that. When I got there, he pretty much was finishing everything up. A very elaborate monitoring system, for all the individual musicians, they could all do their own little monitor mix, with the headphone system and everything. It was an unbelievably elaborate setup. So the studio was just being finished. The main reason he was doing these auditions was because he, for the first time, needed a full-time on-staff engineer for his own studio. Before that, he'd always recorded at Cucamonga, or whatever other studios around town. And they were always doing different albums at different places, or maybe a collection of a lot of different places. So this was the first time he needed a full-time engineer. Once all of that went down, once the audition all went down, and we were going on tour, he just wanted to have a full-time guy that would do - at that point, do the sound on the road, and do the recording and mixing with him in the studio when he was off the road.

Mix: So was part of the test to see how you could find your way around an unfamiliar and brand-new studio?
Pinske: Oh, yeah.

Mix: Did he get you to mix stuff, or just, as you said in your last interview, patch him into various things when he was playing guitar?
Pinske: Oh, no. He wasn't playing guitar. Interestingly enough, when I walked in, there was a couple of people there trying to goof around with some microphones through the system. There was a studio technician there also, nicknamed Midget. They were having trouble with the headphone system, and they were just trying to do a couple of vocal things, and I walked in, and one of the first things he [Frank] said to me, he says, "Look, can you help them fix this problem?" Well, my chops were up pretty high with troubleshooting consoles. I wrote all the troubleshooting procedures and everything at Quad Eight. And I heard this noise coming out of the cue send. It was like the sound an op amp makes when it's going out. It was a very familiar sound with me, because we used a lot of the similar op amps. It was a Signetics 5534, basically, is what it was. And I said, "That sounds like a bad 5534 op amp. So Frank kind of perked up and looked at Midget and just said - and Midget said, "Well, there are no Signetics IC chips in this console. The Harrison console doesn't use Signetics chips, is pretty much what he was saying. So that was the first meeting that I had. It became an interesting turn of events from there. We lifted out the module that the cue sends were on, and sure as heck, there were some 5534 chips on it. We unplugged one. They were all in sockets, so we plugged another one in, and plugged it back down, and the headphone system came up and started working immediately. So it was kind of like a fluke, because - all of a sudden it really looked like I was cool. You walk into a situation, and lots of times you know something or you don't know something. And you say what's on your mind. In Frank's case, if you didn't know something, the best thing you could do was say, "I don't know." Because you couldn't bluff Frank. It wasn't that kind of situation. It was just that it really was a familiar sound that I

heard. So when we put the thing back down, Frank looked at Midget and said, "Midget, I think you owe Mark an apology." [Laughs.] And this was going on before we really started the formal auditioning. We were just goofing off. Needless to say, it put me off to a good start from a technical standpoint. Not necessarily from any other standpoint. That was kind of a fluke.

Mix: As part of the audition, you mixed some multitracks?
Pinske: As a matter of fact, the first thing we did is, we had some multitrack tapes on. Frank had some pretty raw guitar tracks that I remember. I think it was a 16-track tape that was on. And he wanted his guitar patched through a bunch of things. At this point, there was probably about eight racks of effects down one wall, and about four on the other. And just about everything you could imagine in these racks. Mostly the standard stuff, like your UREI 1176s, your EMT stuff. Frank like a lot of things like Mic-Mix Dyno Flangers and all kinds of different toys for guitars, your Lexicon reverbs, that kind of stuff. He wanted to just do some processing. I think I mentioned this to you last time, the patchbay wasn't labeled. There was all these rolls in the patchbay that had these white tape, the white numbers on them, 1 through 48, down the right side of the Harrison patchbay, but they weren't labeled yet. They were just numbered. The oscillator out was labeled, and the stuff that came from the factory on the board was labeled, but none of the auxiliary stuff that was wired in from the racks was actually labeled. That's where I just took an oscillator and started patch out to see what I could light up. And that's where that other comment thing came from. At that point, we just mixed a few things on the 2-track.

Mix: And the other part of the audition was to go to the sound stage and work with a band.
Pinske: The other part of the audition came the next day. Down at Zoetrope Studios, at the time Francis Ford Coppola, the studios, they were called Zoetrope at the time. We went down there, and Frank had a sound stage. There was a P.A. set up, and it was pretty much the old what we called the "dinosaur system," some leftover remnants of the red cabinets that he had, the JBL stuff with the long-throw horns and the bullet tweeters that you stack up, the stuff you pile up to hell and back. And two brand-new Midas consoles that were out there, that was the newest version of the Midas console that I'd ever - they had just done. And they were a very different-looking console. It was a different flavor on console that Midas usually did, because they had a slide fader in the mid range, for your variable frequency. So instead of the normal knob, there was a slide, so it was kind of a non-traditional-layout console. But it was their newest thing. Those two consoles were linked together to the P.A. system. And then there was a little rack there, and there was a little cassette machine in the rack that was wired up to it. Frank had Al Santos, who was the production manager at the time, just mess up the board. He just messed everything up. It sounded pretty shitty, basically. There was noise coming off the stage. And Frank had his wireless guitar, then he just looked at me and said, "Now make it sound good." That's the way he was. He was that way with musicians all the time. It's a little different with an engineer, but with musicians he was that way all the time. He'd chart something out and say, "OK, play it." In my case, I just fiddled around with the channels, started off with the drums, and went through in a somewhat systematic fashion, and grouped the drums, grouped the keyboards, and the band was just kind of rehearsing on stage. They pretty much were just rehearsing, it wasn't like they were doing a show or anything. And then I kind of whipped the thing together the best I could, and he said, "Now put some of it on tape." I grabbed a little cassette tape, and they played a couple of pieces, and that was pretty much all there was to the audition those two different days.

Mix: You told me the rest of the story the other day about how he called you in a couple of weeks. Back to the UMRK facility, you mentioned the board, which was a Harrison, and

the tape machines.
Pinske: At that time, or what we moved to later? Originally it was two MM1200 Ampexes.

Mix: Which were 16 tracks?
Pinske: No, they were 24-track machines, but Frank had 16-track heads that you could just unscrew the head stack and put on a 16-track head stack. And then the last 8 channels just didn't do anything.

Mix: And then monitors? Were they soffited, or did he have free-stand - how was the control room laid out?
Pinske: The monitors was an elaborate five-way setup. It was a typical Westlake-Audio-type setup, with the walnut horns. Have you ever seen - the big monitors with the walnut horns, and two 15s, and the big tweeter. Most of the big monitors, all the big monitors, there was five major big monitors, so right over the top of the console, of the Harrison console, were - it was all brown speaker cloth. So there was three monitors over the top. There was a left center, and a right. With the idea that he was always going to - that he had the potential of doing film mixing. Most of the time, the left and the right were the only ones operative. The board itself, though, had quad output and whatnot, so you could select the quad output and then there was two speakers in the rear also, that were identical. So all five of those speakers were Westlake systems that were built into the actual ceiling walls, the side wall of the ceiling. He had a conglomerate of different types of near field speakers that he liked to use. We used the JBL 4311s, which was pretty traditional, and then he would also have a pair of Auratones, which were always kept on top of the meter bridge of the console. For the most part, that was most of the standard monitoring system for most of the time.

Mix: On one of his albums, and I don't know which, there's a note to the effect that "this album was mixed on (brand name) monitors. For best results, leave your - "
Pinske: Those were 4311s or 4315s, or 4312s, I think. It might have been the white album, I think, or "Drowning Witch" or something. I remember he made a note on it. We mixed the whole album on a pair of 43 - doggone it. The 12-inch JBL three-way. Originally JBL had them called 4310s and 4311s, and they were called 4312s. He had the older version, which had a different crossover point than the brand-new ones he went to later. The 12As and the 13s. JBL kept going through the numbers as they went up, and they changed the type, the style of tweeters they had and everything. This was a kind I had run into before, on an album that I actually played on as a musician. Bill Szymczyk, who had done all the Eagles stuff, had kind of rubbed off on me because I was always asking him questions, I was an engineer asking questions, and he had mixed most of The Eagles' albums on the 4311 JBLs, and he would carry them around with him, and he'd set them on a pair of tripod stands sideways. So when I was doing demo recordings, and home recordings on my own, and recordings with bands in the studio, not anybody that was every known, as I was working my way up, I tried to use some of the 4311s, 4312s, and I usually didn't get the good results on them. So I finally asked Bill when I had the chance. He had all these Gold albums. He had something like 36 Gold albums, the guy was doing something right. And he said the trick is to not let them near any surface. You don't put them on top of any table, you don't put them near any walls, you don't put them in a corner. You don't put them up in a corner in the ceiling. You keep them away from any surface. Because JBL has a tendency to have a very colorated sound. Especially those kind of sounds, the 12-inch speaker with the cone midrange, and then the tweeter. There was just an adjustable path of midrange and treble control. So he always set the tweeter on 12 o'clock, and the midrange on about three o'clock, at about a quarter of the way up. So I started setting it the way he did, because I figured he knew something I didn't, and I

could learn from them. And sure as hell, when you took the things away from the surface, a lot of that extra low-end characteristic, that colorated sound is pretty much what I call it, the colored sound went away. They became a lot more of an honest monitor. We tried that. Frank and I had talked about all this kind of stuff a lot of the time. We didn't know what to trust or not trust. And you know the Westlake Audios were very colorated. So what would happen is, if you tried to mix on those, you would have all this fidelity that sounded really good, and then you take the record somewhere else and it would sound terrible. Because there was so much color, so much hi-fi sound. You hook up a mic bike and go, "Wow, this thing sounds great." So Frank and I got into this thing about not trying to - trying to use a more honest monitoring situation, where the monitoring speaker wasn't necessarily doing us a favor. And then you would spend a little bit more time getting the EQ better.

Mix: Back to the studio. Where there separate rooms for the Bosendorfer, drums, guitars? How many rooms were there?
Pinske: When you looked out through the control-room window - let's just take it from the control room out. The machines were in the back. There were two racks, one on the right side, one on the left side. Gee, I think I even have a Polaroid picture of the control room somewhere. You looked out through the glass, and there was what we called "the yard," which is, out front of the glass, was a carpeted area, close up front, and then it turned into wood. There was two booths on either side. If you're looking out from the control room, out through the studio, there was a sunken booth on the right side, which was pretty much developed and called "the drum room." It had a hardwood floor in it, and you stepped down two steps into it. And it was all glass around it. But it was like an oversize-type booth that was sunken in down the right side. When you looked out to the left side, there was another booth, which pretty much you would call the vocal booth, but again, it was a little bit of an oversize vocal booth. It wasn't tiny, like a lot of them you see. It was carpeted in Sonex, and carpet on the walls. It was a lot deader sound. The percussion room, the idea of the percussion room was to have it a little livened up, and then if you wanted to deaden it a little, you would roll out some carpet over the wood, but it was a wooden floor in it. So Frank had the studio built. It was designed by Rudy Brewer, actually. And Rudy Brewer had a number of typical configurations like this. When you looked out in the room, between the two booths, the room got narrower, and it all turned into wood. As it went back between the two booths, it opened up into this wide back area where the piano was, that had a real high ceiling. You'd go up probably 20, 25 feet, with skylights on it.

Mix: This whole complex was built on the side of his house, or in his yard, or something.
Pinske: It was built on the side of the hill. You had the house, then you had a basement that tied over to it, so it kind of was to the side of it. The yard itself, he actually built a tape vault in the yard. People must have thought he was putting in a swimming pool, but he put a tape vault down there. Because we had a huge tape vault. Which was locked in. The control room itself had one of your typical bass-trap back wall in it. And that was it. There's two other things that's probably important if you talk about the studio itself. Those were live plastered wood walls. To the right and the back there was a chamber that was 46 feet long that was about 4 feet wide. You could step down into this chamber, and we had feeds going out there for speakers, eight different feeds, and a whole bunch of different mic returns. So we could send sounds into different speakers. We had about six sets of JBL speakers in there, and we also had a Leslie in there. And the speed of the Leslie could actually be controlled by a knob that we had on the console back in the control room. So it was an actual live room. Frank was real fond of using real, live reverb. Because a lot of the digital reverbs weren't quite as good then. And then there was also a little chamber underneath the control room. There was another chamber that was under there. That you

had to go down the stairs, and you got to it. There was a tech room downstairs, and there was a little reverb chamber underneath the control room, which we also had eight stereo pairs of feeds going into, and also returning from, with lots of little sets of speakers that we would sometimes feed stuff to and then mic it back up again. We liked to create a real ambient sound all the time, instead of always having dry recordings.

Mix: Was there a permanent drum setup ready-miked? I got the impression from some newsgroup exchanges that once Frank finally had a drum sound he liked in the studio, he liked it so much that it was one of the reasons he replaced the drums and bass on "We're Only in It for the Money," and "Ruben and the Jets." That's the question. Did he have a permanent drum setup?
Pinske: He had a studio set of drums, but we normally used the artist's drums. In that particular case, we took Chad Wackerman's drums. We had over a period of time eliminated the fact that John Goode, who's now the vice president of DW Drums, John was our drum roadie on tour. Frank became very fond of him, so John tuned all the drums for us. And what we would do is, John and I and Chad Wackerman, or whoever the drummer was - the ones that you talked about where we replaced the drums on "Rudy and the Jets" and that stuff, I was not very fond of that, because I really wanted - there was a chance for me to be able to remix all the original albums, you're talking about the old box master set, probably, and I was kind of upset about the fact that he wanted to replace the drums, because I had already gotten a pretty good drum sound out of even the mono recordings that were on the original ones, but he kind got - that was him getting carried away again. Trying to say, "Well, we might as well make it better." What we would do is, we would spend two or three days, just John and I and Chad, and we would try all kinds of different drum heads, and all kinds of different microphones, and all kinds of different things to try to get the absolute best drum sound we could get. So when we were done, we would have a really elaborate, great-sounding drum set. And Frank really loved this. He got to love the drum set so much. Where we really started getting carried away was on, like a piece called "Cocaine Decisions" on "Man From Utopia." We just had this EMT compressors, and the toms would sound real big, and all this kind of stuff. So Frank started really liking this really good drum sound, and kind of wanted to start hearing it on just about everything. It was just a phase. We would go through these phases. Unfortunately, when we redid the old box set, a lot of the recordings were so bad, when we got the original 10-track 1-inch masters, and 12-track 1-inch master . . .

Mix: They were 10-track 1-inch masters?
Pinske: Yeah. There was a couple of them that were 10-track 1-inch masters. There was a machine that was built by Les Paul, down at Cucamonga Studios. It was a homemade machine that was probably the only 10-track tape that was ever existence in the world. It was a 10-track 1-inch.

Mix: You said Les Paul. Do you mean Paul Buff?
Pinske: No, no. Les Paul. Les Paul and Paul Buff together. Paul Buff was the recording - was the engineer at Cucamonga. Later formed Valley People. Paul invented the noise gates and everything else. Frank actually had the original noise gate that Paul Buff invented. He was always really innovative. But they built a recorder together. It was a 10-track 1-inch. And the funny thing about it is, the darn thing sounded really good. It looked like some old refrigerator or something. It was homemade. We transferred all that stuff over, and when I transferred a lot of these tapes, they would only, in those days, just give one track to the drums. Drums never had much priority, so they might just have one shotgun mic or something in front of a drum kit. It wasn't anything great to listen to.

Mix: That must have been around '84, when you went digital. You didn't transfer them to 24-track analog, did you?
Pinske: Oh, no, no. That stuff was later, yeah. We had the digital machine them, and I transferred them over to the digital machine. But what I did was, I had to almost make homemade - at that time - you know when I told you we bought the truck from the Beach Boys? In that truck was a Studer 2-inch 24-track. That was a lot better 24-track, sonically, than the Ampex MM1200s. We put the Studer in there, being the permanent fixture in the corner, and what I did was, I made, we kind of made homemade guides so I could take the 12-track 1-inch tapes and play them on the bottom 12 tracks of the 24-track 2-inch head. The problem with that was, it was a real meticulous thing, because you couldn't rewind them fast, because the tape would all creep up, and it wouldn't pack right. You could really only pass them through one time, because the guide system wasn't all that great. I took a pair of 1-inch rollers, for instance, and put them across there. So I meticulously striped those things. Also, we were concerned about the delicacy of the fact that they were old masters, and oxide's falling off them, and all this kind of stuff, so you didn't want to play them any more times than you had to. So, what I did was, I'd do a real slow wind in Play speed, and then I would stripe them across, and the stripe across and hard patch them right across onto the digital machine, so that we could preserve the tracks the best we can, in the minimal amount of time of playing the tapes. So we did that with all the old masters that we got back from the end, the result of the lawsuit. So time-wise, it probably was about '82, '83, '84.

Mix: You mentioned that 1. the UMRK Frank built, before you arrived, and it cost him $3.5 million, and then you also mentioned that the out-of-court settlement from Warner Bros. was 12 million or 12.5 million?
Pinske: About 12.5 million, plus all the original masters.

Mix: Was that money that they'd been holding in escrow, because it was royalties owed to him on his DiscReet catalogue, or was part of it a sort of, "OK, we'll give you this money to make you stop suing us?"
Pinske: No, it was just a settlement. Quite honestly, Frank had lost a lot of money. The sad thing about it was, he was already in the lawsuit before I came on board, and the lawsuit, I think, lasted a period of about five years, a little over five years, and he was spending a lot of money per month on lawyers. A huge amount of money. Appealing all the hearings that they had. [End of side.]

Mix: When did the Synclavier show up, and what did you do with it? Did it go in the studio?
Pinske: Yeah. The Synclavier came right in the control room. As a matter of fact, Steve De Furia, who was a gentleman from New England Digital, came in to do a demonstration for us. Gee whiz, I'm trying to think of the exact time, the exact year - when we did the "Francesco Zappa" album right after that. But he came in and did an audition with the Synclavier, and Frank saw it as a very usable tool. Something that would be - oh, gee, I don't know - something we could use to implement samples and making good recordings, and all that kind of stuff. (Beth, you might want to call Max on the other line. Something keeps beeping me. I think he may be trying to call.) Anyways, so when he auditioned the Synclavier, Frank said, "Well, we need somebody to operate this thing." So he offered Steve De Furia the job. To just come on board with us. And Steve accepted the job. Steve was working with me in the control room when we started going into the so-called Synclavier phase. And him and Frank started doing all kinds of archiving together on the actual Synclavier itself. Heck, we had - at one point, believe it or not, we lost about three months worth of work into that thing, when the Winchester hard drive crashed. It was just a heartbreaker. In those days we still had some of those reliability problems.

Mix: Do you have any kind of representative log of your hours worked at UMRK on one or more projects? Ideally I'd like a reproducible diary or studio log showing numbers of hours worked over a week or so. I'm thinking about a little graphic here.
Pinske: Actually, somewhere in the boxes that I did when I moved, I have a couple boxes in when I moved, I don't keep them readily handy or anything, but somewhere where I moved I have - I actually have some of the original studio logs of - they're basically red notebooks that I wrote stuff down in. there may be some track-sheet-type things. I actually have a real collection of studio lacquers that I did, because Frank had me pretty much do all the mastering runs. He got to where he trusted me, so I would go down to KenDun when we did KenDun, and when we did K-Disk. And then we started doing a lot of mastering over at Capitol, and eventually we ended up with a guy named John Matousek over at Hitsville, Motown. And John was really the coolest guy. And I would run down at two or three o'clock in the morning, and we'd run off a lacquer and I'd bring it back up to the studio and Frank and I would listen to it.

Mix: Of a complete album side?
Pinske: Of - all the albums we did that way, pretty much. Frank stopped going down to the mastering rooms, and pretty much sent me down. We would voice the room. I had a really elaborate voicing method. It would take me - I would spend hours and hours with an Ivie analyzer, voicing the room. And we came down with a voicing curve, to where you could really hear really minute articulate differences. Most people thought we were crazy. I would cut a lacquer, for instance, and Frank would say, "OK, go down and have them take off one half of a dB at 800 Hertz. And I'd go down there, and most of the guys'd laugh. One-half dB? Some of them didn't even have one-half dB increments. But we would do it. And Frank could hear the difference. We'd notice the difference. A lot of times, I would even try him out. I would put the wrong one on, just to see whether or not he would hear the difference, and he would hear right away. So he had this really fine-tuned ability to tune in to frequencies and balances and all this kind of stuff. I guess I forgot the question. I'm sorry. It's about the mastering, though, right? Oh, the logs. Oh, sorry. I don't have anything ready available, without tearing through some of my moving boxes that are all stacked up. I've got tapes and things like that that Frank gave me over the years. Cassette tapes, and some of these kind of things that I've always intended to put on CD, that I never got around to, and I was always going to do it like, next year. I got tons of that stuff that I never got around to. It's mainly just, never had the time to do it.

Mix: Just bear in mind that we'll need some graphics. At some point I'd like a photo of you. And if you've got a picture of you and Frank in the studio, that'd be great.
Pinske: I probably have something on my computer, that I scanned in. And I've got a couple of different types of pictures of me, even on tour and stuff with him. There's not a whole lot. Probably two or three different - I might have a shot, maybe an old washed-out shot of the recording truck, and maybe something inside the studio.

Mix: If you come across anything that you think might look good in print, just put it aside and we'll gather it all up together when we've got the article laid out. I've got some [questions] on "Joe's Garage," which according to the information I have was released on November 19, 1979. But I guess that was Volume One.
Pinske: That was just before I got hired. I got hired in December, 1979. So I was coming in right on the tail end of it. In fact, I think Joe Chicarelli quit 'cause he got fed up with - the way Frank put it was, he would give up on a - he'd want a better snare sound, and he would just, wouldn't stick to it, or something. Kind of gave up on how much tweaking Frank liked to do.

Mix: Did you get involved in mixing Acts Two and Three, or were you involved in any of the studio work on the second part of "Joe's Garage?"
Pinske: On "Joe's Garage," no. Not really. The actual releases on that - the full releases were completed before I did. We did a mastering on one, and we redid one cut, I think on one release we did that I was involved with after that, but it was like finishing up busy work. It wasn't anything that's even worth - I wouldn't claim it as any credit at all.

Mix: Was the rehearsal space/warehouse named for the album, or was it the other way around?
Pinske: That's a tricky question here. Because you could ask me lots of things, like where Dweezil got his name, which is one Gail's toes, and that kind of stuff, but I never did quite understand which came first. The rehearsal place in Hollywood, north of Vine and Hollywood there, was always there. That's where he kept all his band equipment, and then there was a rehearsal stage there. It was called "Joe's garage" the whole time that I know. So he either named the rehearsal place after the album, or he named the album after the garage. I couldn't tell you which one came first. It's like the chicken and the egg. [Laughs.]

Mix: It contained all the stage gear between tours, plus, presumably, whatever sound and/or lights equipment that he owned. What kind of equipment was there? Did he own all the keyboards that the players .. .
Pinske: Oh, absolutely. The amount of equipment was enormous. Frank had a collection of equipment that almost wouldn't end. You'd go down there, there would be extra racks from the tour, there would be different types of microphone cases, there would be enough stuff down there to fully rehearse - guitar amps, monitor amps, mixing boards, that he had owned. Plus what we called the original dinosaur system, the sound system, and later the whole Meyer system. The Meyer system was all stored down there when we bought it. He would keep anything to do with sound. The lights would go in and out. The lights we would buy and sell, but the sound stuff he kept. And he was kind of a fanatic about keeping guitar stuff. That's what that - "blue box for bimbos" was a double rack - it was like taking two racks and bolting them together, and then putting in almost every guitar gadget you could think of. Everything from an Electro-Harmonix Big Muff to your Dyna-Mix flangers - most of this - MXR digital delays, just about anything you could think of that came out was in this rack. And then we had an elaborate preamplifier set up that David Gray did. I think this is one of the things that got David so good with noise reduction, because some of that stuff was so bad. He would build these buffer circuits, and wired up this rack elaborately, so you'd go through all these devices. There'd be chorusing, there'd be flanges, there would be various types of compressors, and third-octave equalizers. The whole gamut of things. And the whole box got it's reputation - Frank called it the "blue box for bimbos." It was blue. And we would use that rack in the studio to record. We would just put signals through it and then run them through Marshall amps. That was at Joe's garage most of the time, and it was normally used on tours.

Mix: Presumably he had a full-time equipment crew, of at least one person.
Pinske: Yeah. Marque Coy became that person. As a matter of fact, Marque Coy - you know, my nickname was "Markman," and Marque Coy's nickname was "Marque-son." And Marque-son is still working there. He's still at Joe's Garage. You can call him and talk to him, as a matter of fact. He's still at Joe's Garage out there.

Mix: And he was the monitor mixer?
Pinske: He was the monitor mixer, and now he's got the original Harrison down there, and they been doing recordings there for years. All the bands that come through, like Tom Petty, or Rod Stewart, or whoever rehearses there, Marque puts them down on tape. And

he records there, so now they've modified Joe's Garage to where it's kind of like an SIR or lead studio, you know, where you rehearse, and you have the ability to record, too. There's a full sound stage there. Marque took most of the original stuff that was in the control room where we did all the albums you and I are talking about, and built a little control room down there. That has most of that original archive stuff in it. Including the tape machine. They rebuilt and refurbished all the tape machines. So Marque Coy has got that stuff there. I'm sure he'd be glad to show you some of that. Are you out there in L.A.?
Mix: No, I'm in Emeryville. The Bay Area. I can get down there. And I might do that. This is turning into quite a project. My next set of questions is about 1980, during which no albums came out. You spent most of the time on tour.
Pinske: We were on tour throughout - it was my first European tour, as well.

Mix: How was traveling? You said earlier you were traveling with the band, rather than with the crew.
Pinske: Right. I flew with the band. The band would fly, and stayed in real nice hotels. In fact, my room was always between Ray White and Ike Willis'. I don't know why that was, but we kind of got known as the Oreos, later. Because we had two black guys, and I was the white guy between the two black guys. It was just an ongoing little joke.

Mix: Was it a big improvement over your previous touring experience?
Pinske: Oh, God. It was like stepping into heaven, man. Listen, just so you know, there's no experience like that. You can't repeat an experience like the privilege that I had, being able to record with Frank all those years. When you have the opportunity to work with a true genius, that spends his time and his money just creating, and there's nothing stopping what you're going to try. It's the ultimate for any engineer. And the touring was just as well. As a matter of fact, on tour, I felt like I had it better, because Frank worked me to death off the road. We were always in the studio. We'd sleep four hours a night on an average, and just come back and start right over. On the road, I was in a hotel, and then all we would do is go in and do our sound check. We'd come in and do a three o'clock sound check. After the sound check, we would eat a meal with the caterers, do the show, and then leave.

Mix: Before you had the truck, you had a remote recording setup. Or were you doing front-of-house for the first part of the 1980.
Pinske: I did front-of-house for all of 1980. I was the front-of-house mixer. Except for like when we did the Halloween shows at the Palladium, the traditional Halloween shows at the Palladium, I would help with the recordings. Most of the time, I would do the house mix, otherwise.

Mix: But you were recording at the same time?
Pinske: It depends on which stage you're talking about. Originally we had a guy named Claus Wiedemann, and George Douglas, who had a little 8-track Soundcraft 1-inch that we set up backstage, with a bunch of different noise gates and some remote feeds and everything. We did some what you might call pretty, relatively crude live recordings.

Mix: Did you send them submixes from front of house?
Pinske: Oh, yeah. I would send them mixes. They would take some things direct. We would track things multiple ways. The more we did it, as we went on, the more we ended up - we ended up reusing some of the tapes, because maybe the show wasn't coming out the best. And we milked--a lot of the "Shut Up 'n Play Yer Guitar" stuff, and that kind of stuff came off some of those. Four-tracks and 8-tracks. Some of them turned out fairly decent. We hired Mick Glossop, who came in and did a live digital 2-track with us one time. And him and I worked together. I set him up a console all of his own, and I did the

house mix, and he did the recording mix, and I'd feed him some of the sub feeds from the keyboards, and feed things like that, but he pretty much did some really nice live recordings on his own, of tapes we did later. I wanted to say one other thing. There was a number of engineers that had left behind some really brilliant recordings. I just wanted you to know that. When you pulled some of them out, you just wondered how some of these got so good, that we used on some of those collaborative things.

Mix: I've got some questions coming up about that. So if you were touring with the band, who set up the mics and your front-of-house position, and did all the line checks?
Pinske: I did all the line checks. Our crew was very, very - Jesus, I don't know how you would say it in a few words, but incredibly trained. The drum guys, like John Goode would do the drums and the percussions. Each guy - we had a guy doing the bases, whether it was Scott Thunes or Artie Barrow, we would split up - the guys on stage would all be responsible for their own little area. I would go up and check the drum mics. Like we would use AKG 414s on a figure-eight pattern between the crash cymbals, or something like this. I would sometimes check the alignment of the mics. We clamped things down, and put things, and did as much direct-pickup stuff as we could so that we could have less variances in the live sound as well as whatever we were trying to record. And in '80 it was kind of a barbaric start of why we went to the truck later. Because we could only go so far, but we learned a lot of techniques that way. Out front, I had the two Midas consoles. I would have whole racks of noise gates. We gated as much as we could. We processed as much as we could. So we would check every line every day, one at a time, and make sure that when they sound checked - Frank would use sound check as a rehearsal. He would write songs on the road. We'd come back off the road, there may be eight, ten, twelve brand-new songs that he wrote on the road. That's where most of the new stuff would come from, actually.

Mix: We're still talking about 1980, your first year. Was that when the "Crush All Boxes" project was being discussed?
Pinske: No, actually, "Crush All Boxes" came a little later. "Crush All Boxes" was done more off of the other recordings that came after '81.

Mix: I got some source that says a three-album set called "Warts and All" was planned from I think the Odeon Hammersmith tapes that wound up being used for "Tinsel Town Rebellion." Do you know anything about that?
Pinske: I didn't know anything about that title. That might have been something that Bob Stone and Frank did after I had left. Because him and Bob continued on. As a matter of fact, Bob kind of - him and I - we always got along OK, don't get me wrong, but he kind of over compressed stuff, and when he redid some of the mastering, he kind of rushed a lot of it through in a hurry. Some of the CDs that got re-released didn't sound nearly as good as the original vinyls did. They were kind of like reprocessed and redone, and just didn't quite have the imaging I felt like some of them -

Mix: That brings up the question of how come Frank didn't stop it, or notice it? There was too much going on?
Pinske: Quite honestly, it's a - that's kind of a tough call to make on that. He got pretty fatigued with all the studio work we did. His right ear was getting a little worse, for sure. He was starting to have trouble hearing high frequencies in his right ear. And Frank would pretty much let the engineer in charge kind of run with it. Bob was good. Everybody had their own kind of styles. But Bob was into a lot of over compression and stuff, and most people would notice it, but Frank sort of started letting it go, and almost in a way kind of liking it, just like another one of those phases. He'd just kind of redo stuff just to redo it,

rather than because you needed to redo it. A lot of times, we would have a lot of albums, I'm sure you know, as well as you know most of the stuff, that some of the stuff we did was in fabulous shape, and there was no reason to rerecord or re-release some of these tunes at all. We would get into re-releasing some stuff, and it was almost like kicking a dead horse. There was no reason to do it. It was almost like we were doing it just to do it. I think that's where some of that came in. He'd get fatigued. Normally he was a lot pickier.

Mix: Before we leave the road thing, tell me about John Smothers. He comes up all the time, but I have an incomplete picture of why his - mangled English -
Pinske: I just pulled this up in the computer, so let me get you the Joe's Garage number. It's 818/765-4261. Marque Coy is the one. That's in Van Nuys. I just thought I'd give you that number while I had you. John Smothers was the bodyguard, of course.

Mix: Who he hired after he got pushed off stage.
Pinske: That happened before me. When he was going into the pits, I think over in London, I think.

Mix: It was in '71. I had tickets for that show.
Pinske: Did you? Well, then you know more about that than -

Mix: Well, I didn't see it, because he did two shows, and I had tickets for the second show, and he was -
Pinske: That's when he decided - I think he thought that some guy thought he was - the Frank always told the story to me was, he thought that some guy in the audience thought that he was looking at his girlfriend, and he got all bent out of shape about it, jumped up and threw him in the pit, or something, and he didn't want that to happen anymore. That's pretty much the way he told it to me. But Smothers was an interesting fellow. He looked tougher than he was. He was a pretty nice guy. He traveled with us everywhere, of course. And Frank would make fun of him, and we would use what we would call different variations of his lingo, sometimes even in some of the songs. Frank would refer to some of that stuff. He got the laminated passes, and he had this character about him. But he was - primarily always with Frank, all the time on the road. He unpacked all his clothes, and packed it up and all that stuff.

Mix: I don't mean to pry, but I'm just curious. Did he have a speech impediment, or is he from a different linguistic culture?
Pinske: He didn't really have a speech impediment. Frank would always - and John actually didn't speak all that bad. He would just say things sometimes that were kind of stupidly funny. Like, "I just sold my house and I got myself a notary republican and everything." But Frank would always take it and put that extra added thing on it, like you know he would. He would make the accent sound more drastic. Like we did with "Thing-Fish," with Ike Willis. When we did Barry - we called it "Barely White," when he did his Barry White imitation - we'd actually tape his tongue with a piece of grey tape to the outside of his mouth, so it would sound more ridiculous. With Smothers, I think he kind of - Smothers almost got a not-quite fair deal on that. He didn't talk that bad.

Mix: I'm just curious, because I never met the guy, and I've never seen him. And he figures large in the folklore.
Pinske: I'm kind of wondering if he's even alive now. I don't know.

Mix: We're coming up to "Tinsel Town Rebellion." "Fine Girl," which sounds fabulous, is a studio track, while the rest of the album is live, with some overdubs on first part of "Easy

Meat."
Pinske: Yeah. We did overdubs on vocals throughout that album, too. That was like Bob Harris' original audition was on "Fine Girl," off that album.

Mix: Doing the high - boy soprano part.
Pinske: Mm-hmm. Bob was a guy that I used to know, actually played in a band with me in the past, and Ray and Ike were having trouble with falsettos, so I suggested to Frank that we try this guy out. And that was actually his audition, that went on, that whole ad-lib thing through "Fine Girl" was actually Bob's audition.

Mix: I was going to ask about recording the voices, but now, you'd been working with Ray and Ike for a year already by the time you came to mix that - work on that album, right?
Pinske: I did all the tracking and all the mixing on that one.

Mix: I only know Ray and Ike from the records. How would you characterize their voices? Were they working as twin leads, or did they take alternate leads?
Pinske: Oh, they were absolutely fabulous. First off, they were incredibly funny to be around, and they got along good. Ike's voice, of course - both of them were in the group primarily for their singing. Neither one of them actually read music, you know. And that was very unusual for Frank to have somebody, but Frank liked to surround himself with good singers, because he always called himself a low-grade vocalist. [Laughs.] So he would surround himself with better singers. And Ike and Ray had a blend, along with Frank, and they knew how to blend with Frank. But no, they would take alternate leads. You would have - Ray would sing the bluesy-er stuff, or the ad-lib stuff, "Doreen," and Ike would sing another whole style. Ike would say like "Outside Now." Unfortunately, Ike lost a lot of his voice - his voice was real clear at one time. And him and Ray were in very prime shape in those days. All through the '80s, the live shows had most of their power as a result of a lot of their vocals. Then we had Bobby Martin, of course, and/or Bob Harris singing along with them. And the live vocals were actually quite a treat.

Mix: They come off very well on the stage series.
Pinske: Incredible. As a matter of fact, that was one of the most fun things about doing the recordings, later, when I got the recording track going, because you could solo these guys up, and they would pour every ounce of their soul into every performance. They didn't save it. They were real, true pros. They put everything they could into everything they did. It was a real pleasure to work with them. The vocals in the studio, however, were like the most fun thing. Unfortunately, the public, or Frank's fans, never got to hear our outtakes. I used to run a 2-track machine, and ATR-102 Ampex. I would just let it run when we did the sessions. Because what was coming through the board would go on there. And these guys would joke with each other, and Frank would make up harmony parts and stuff, and change lyrics. And he would sit on the - he would hit the talkback, and talk to them, and say, "Try doing this," and "try doing that." And those guys would joke with each other, and it was just a cutup. It was just so original, and so unique, the kind of things that would happen. And then they would - especially when you had Ike Willis, Ray White, and Bob Harris, all three of them together out there in the studio. We would track all three of them at a time, all on their own microphone, singing most of their parts all three together at once. And sometimes we'd lay three of them on one track, we'd lay them on separate tracks, sometimes we'd double, we'd triple 'em. That kind of thing. Those outtakes were just - we would have so much fun. Frank would tell jokes, and Ray would say something like, "Ike, you gotta move over, you're lip's too big. There's no room in here." There would be this kind of fun time, which to me, as an engineer, was the most enjoyable recordings of my life. Those vocal sessions were just awesome. And I think some of that attitude, and

some of that fun, came out on the tape. I think that's a lot of what made it so good. And of course, Frank's producing. Sometimes he would put together an absolutely fabulous harmony, and then we would erase it. It was painful.

Mix: The live tapes that went into "Tinsel Town Rebellion," as far as I can make out, came from the '78 and '79 bands.
Pinske: Oh, God. They came from - you ever seen the list of engineers on that album?

Mix: That's the trouble. I've got the CD, and there are no engineers listed, apart from Bob Stone for the additional remastering. Sorry to tell you this.
Pinske: I got them on my wall here. The actual real album credits, which unfortunately are only on the albums themselves, "produced by Frank Zappa; engineers: Mark Pinske, George Douglas, Joe Chicarelli, Allen Sides, Tommy Fly; remix engineer: Bob Stone; disc mastering: Joe Hansch from K-Disc. So the tracks that we used were tracks that I did. There was a couple of tracks that George Douglas did on a 4-track from live. There were tracks left over from Joe Chicarelli, and then Allen Sides and I did a lot of recording together, even after this, on "You Are What You Is," I think Allen did some recording with me, too, in the studio and out of the studio, and also, Allen did some of the live tapes at the New York Palladium. Before we had the truck, we rented the Record Plant truck. And Allen had done that. So the actual credits on the real album are myself first, George Douglas, Joe Chicarelli, Allen Sides. The albums had all the original credits, and little notes by Frank, according to how things were done originally. Later on, just so you know, I had a little bit of a mini fallout with Gail, after I had left Frank. And because of that, she started striking my name off a number of things. She was kind of mad at me over another issue. Really what it was about is, she tried to order me to do some things, and Frank told her that I worked for him. And pretty much told her off. That put a little bit of a bad nail between the two of us. So later on, when they did all this repackaging stuff, she just decided to skimp on the artwork and everything else. And think some of them was to save money, of course.

Mix: It seems that the CD repackaging has gone through a couple of generations, of early issues with skimpy packaging, and then they got Cal Schenkel involved, and came back and redid them, supposedly with much improved artwork.
Pinske: I'll tell you what, if you listen - you take the "Thing-Fish" lacquer, for instance, and put in on and listen to it, just the original - even one of the original pressings, and then you put on the CD, you almost have to take the CD and throw it in the trash, it just sounds lousy. It doesn't have any of the ambience of the stuff we did off the walls or anything. It was all crushed and over compressed. It's a shame. It's a darn shame. Because we used to do - you realize, we started doing a lot of mastering over at Sheffield, where we did what they called "groove sculpturing." And some of those lacquers sounded immaculate. Absolutely immaculate. I couldn't understand why, when they redid - and of course, we would do, with John Matousek, when I started getting into doing all the really good quality albums, we did a lot of EQ'ing, and a lot of work in the room itself when we actually cut the lacquers. So none of that stuff would have been on the original 2-track. [End of tape.]

Here's the deal. We cut a deal with Ampex to drop hundreds of rolls of tapes at different cities, like Chicago, New York, whatever, well Agfa started bidding against us, and we started using Agfa 468. Now, when we got off the tour, we switched in the middle of the tour on - I think this was about the '83 tour, maybe even the '84 - we started razor-blade editing a lot of the songs together from different shows. And you couldn't even tell the difference in the cymbals across the edits. That's what Frank liked about the consistency we did in the recording. Well, some of the tapes that we meant to mix for an album, after

we'd edit them together, we'd usually mix them down to the Sony digital, the 3/4-inch digital 1510 system. Some of them we didn't get to mix, because we edited way more songs than we were able to have time to mix, we put in the tape vault. And a number of these tapes ended up in the vault for over a year. When we pulled them out a year later, the edits didn't work. The cymbals would drop as much as three or four dB at the high frequencies, when they went to the Ampex 456, and then when we went back to the Agfa tape, it would get bright again. This was very frustrating from an engineering standpoint, because you realize, this is analog tape. The longer analog tape sits, the duller it gets. It isn't like the digital medium. So this is one of the main reasons why I thought remastering a lot of the stuff was stupid. Because we had better original tapes a lot, and even remixing some of it. We had better-sounding mixes and better-sounding tapes that were archived on digital from earlier. There was not really a reason to remix some of it. Anyway, without getting into a long story about it, the frustration about all that is, when we did - Terry Bozzio, when I remixed the whole "Baby Snakes" movie, we would have tapes that maybe the first 20 seconds would sound right, and then all of a sudden it would get dull, and everything would change. We'd have to strike the board, re-cue and reset everything, just to make the edit work. And you might strike the board maybe 8, 10, 12 times through one song, just to try to make the sonics match, on edits that originally ran across like butter. So this is the kind of thing that was so frustrating. Same thing happened to me on the "Freak Out" masters, when we got it back. Frank wanted me to do an edit on them, the original "Freak Out" masters, and I went to where the edit was, and there was about ten inches of clear plastic. The oxide had completely fallen off. And it was such a shame. The original 2-track was gone. Never to be heard again. So that's why we tried to recreate that stuff. And by the way, I did totally recreate those original masters with the original tracks on them. There were mixes done of them. And then we later overdubbed Chad Wackerman and some bass and some of this other things, when the old box set got redone, but there was actual mixes. And there was actual transfers of the original tracks that were preserved in immaculate shape. That was one of my whole projects. I did that for - over three months of my time was doing nothing but transferring over the old archives. In my mind, I too, and I imagine a lot of the original Frank fans, would have loved to hear the original stuff redone, instead of the overdubbed drum stuff.

Mix: Going back to "Tinsel Town Rebellion," was there much difference in the quality of the tapes recorded by Mick Glossop at the Odeon, and -
Pinske: Oh, Mick Glossop was one of my idols, then. I gotta tell you, I could take out a tape from Mick Glossop, a 16-track, and put it on, and it just sounded great. Sounded great. The guy did some really good work.

Mix: I don't mean to downgrade the other guys, but I was just wondering what the diff -
Pinske: . . .so many of the tapes sucked, then when you get somebody that did a good job, you just really appreciate it.

Mix: "Tinsel Town Rebellion" was originally released as a double LP. Did you get involved in the mastering process for Frank's albums? I think you answered that.
Pinske: That was Joe Hansch at K-Disc. Joe and I did the mastering together on that. He's on a number of albums. Let me get the spelling correct for you on that. At that time, he was at K Disc. Before that he was at KenDun Recorders. And then we moved from KenDun to K-Disc.

Mix: One thing I noticed that Frank Zappa commonly put between 15 and 19 minutes on a side. Presumably that's because anything longer than that would require mastering at a lower level. Was that your experience?

Pinske: Absolutely. We never tried to squeeze 22 minutes or more on a side, because of the fact that we wanted to cut a hotter lever and deeper groove. A lot of that came from Joe Hansch. A lot of the different engineers we used along the way. But when we later got with John Matousek, he was able to get us better-sounding lacquers - oh, Lord, which album was it? "Man From Utopia," or one of the albums I mixed, Joe Hansch thought was a nightmare. He thought it was one of the worse mixes in the world. Later on, whenever I tried out a new mastering room, like when we went from K-Disc over to Capitol Records, because we changed deals quite a bit, Frank would say, "Well, just take - go ahead and take 'Man From Utopia' with you." Or no, it was "Them Or Us," or - and I would take the tape over with me, because there would be a lot of out-of-phase, low-frequency stuff intentionally, you know, on floor tom-toms, or something like that. And when we got to Hitsville, John Matousek ran us a lacquer that was 2 dB hotter than any of the lacquers we released. And it sounded great. And he looked at me and said, "Man, this is a really well-mixed album." And I about died. Because everybody else had told me how many problems it was. Then I realized, I started learning right then and there, that a lot of it had to do with how good of a mastering engineer you have. How well they can set up a lathe or whatever. And what kind of equipment was in the actual room itself, as far as electronics and the signal path, and everything like that. Because John took some of our albums that earlier we had trouble with, "Tinsel Town Rebellion" was one of them, and cut us some actual lacquers that sounded fabulous. The other thing I just want to say real quickly about that, all the original liner notes on Frank's albums and, unfortunately, all the little notes he made like, crediting the people in the crew, like on "Tinsel Town Rebellion" he credits Thomas Nordegg for everything remote, and he gives special assistance - he talks about the AKG microphones we used on something, or he would make notes about how we recorded something and what we did differently. He talks about how the Santa Monica civic Auditorium concert is what we used for the guitar solo on "Fine Girl" and "Easy Meat," and where we took certain things from, Berkeley Community Theater, and how we went back and forth to certain live recordings and in and out of studio recordings and stuff. Those kind of notes, unfortunately, a lot of them just got lost on the CDs.

Mix: There's a striking lack of credit to Mark Pinske on most of the albums.
Pinske: That's because later on, Gail struck a lot of them out of it. But that really didn't matter to me. I did the original work, and it was on the original albums, and most of the people that were fans knew this, or whoever has the album. I got, like, Jesus, a huge amount out - all of that credit stuff, later on - originally, like I said, I wanted to get some credits in the business. But later on, once I started doing that stuff, they mean a whole lot less. You'd like to take your name off some of the bad work you did. As you get older, it's not such a big deal.

Mix: "Shut Up 'n Play Yer Guitar," I have to tell you that the CD version of the three albums in one box doesn't have any credits for you.
Pinske: I did not do that album. "Shut Up 'n Play Yer Guitar" was a collection of stuff that was done off of 2-track and 4-track recordings that were--most of them I think were remixed by Bob Stone, but they were not tapes the I had recorded. They were instrumental stuff from previously old stuff, anywhere from 1970 on up.

Mix: They're all pretty old. They're from the Odeon, Berkeley, Santa Monica.
Pinske: It was before I even was working with Frank. But the albums came out while I was with Frank, but remember how I said Bob and I did a tag team? What Frank was doing is, he was running--we started doing two eight- to ten-hour shifts each. And what we had gotten into for a while was, Bob refused to work more than eight hours. I would work 10 to 12, 13 hours without a problem. Frank kind of got to the conclusion that any engineer's

ears wear out, to the point where you just can't get any creative mixing done after a certain point. So we started doing tag teams. I would be mixing one project, and Bob would be mixing another. And what we'd do was, I would finish a mix with Frank, and normally, whenever we finished a mix, we struck the whole board, because none of the tapes--the songs were all different. So Bob and Frank started doing a lot of the 2-track and 4-track stuff in between the sessions when I went home and slept. So those albums, really, most of those "Shut Up 'n Play Yer Guitar," and "The Return of the Son of Shut Up 'n Play Yer Guitar," most of those were all instrumental collections of whatever was in the tape vault. There's three different tape vaults, so you know that, as well.

Mix: Do you want to describe them? Were they all put in at the same time as the studio?
Pinske: No, no. There was one tape vault put in the front yard, but there was a tape vault downtown, and there was also another one that--there was two off-premises, one of them that had all the original Warner Bros. tapes in and stuff. What had happened is, after the lawsuit was over, we took most of the stuff out of that particular vault and moved them all into the main vault, which was outside of the studio in the lawn, built underneath the lawn. And there was a big generator down there, as well, too, by the way, a diesel generator so if the power went off, it would just automatically kick on, we would still have backup power.

Mix: When did Bob Stone joint the organization, and under what circumstances? He was literally hired as a second engineer?
Pinske: He was only hired as a remix engineer, and that was mainly because, like I said, when we started doing these back-to-back sessions, I was doing a lot of tracking. I tracked basically everything. Bob never tracked, as a matter of fact, he never tracked anything. He was brought in--we tried out a couple of guys, too. I'm trying to remember if we brought Davey Moire back. We tried out a couple of guys, and Frank--Bob Stone came recommended to Frank, and he tried him out, and they got along fine, and he seemed to do good work. And most of the time, Frank would tell you what he wanted anyway. There was a little freedom about how you could do your own mixing, but Frank would tell you want he wanted to change in a mix. He would sit there in the gray chair behind you and say, "Bring up this vocal, bring down this vocal, try to make this guitar sound a little bit better, get this keyboard to sound a little bit better, let's put a little stereo spread on this." Frank was a fanatic about having things sound a certain way that he wanted. Because of that, to a certain degree, whether I was sitting in the chair or Bob, a lot of it would come out sounding the same. But however, Bob was a little different. He would over compress a little bit more, and stuff like that with me. At first I think Frank was being a little more careful, and that's why he was doing 2-track, 4-track, and 8-track stuff with Bob a lot. And I was doing the heavier multitrack stuff. And that's where the difference came in a lot of the albums. Then as Bob got progressively better, I actually learned some things from Bob, and Bob learned some things from me, and we kind of started really getting along really good, so we would actually sometimes mix portions of the same song. Which was kind of neat, from an engineering standpoint. It made things a whole lot more creative, and it made things a whole lot better. And it also made things a whole lot more efficient, because Frank wouldn't have to stop working on a particular song or part of an album, just because we were changing shifts or something like that. He could actually keep going. Sometimes Frank would actually go up and sleep while I would tweak something or Bob might tweak something. We might spend two or three hours tweaking the mix, and then call Frank up. Frank had an anechoic chamber that slept in, and we would call him down when we were ready for him. That way Frank could keep his ears fresh, too. It wasn't always sitting there all the time. That's why it's real hard to explain the collaborative-ness. The main difference was, Bob never did any tracking. He just didn't--he was mainly a remix guy. And that's why

they're always so careful about saying "remix." Which is kind of a stupid credit, if you think about it. All of that stuff was kind of malarkey.

Mix: If I've got these dates right, "You Are What You Is," which was released in September '81, I guess it was recorded during the summer of '81, and that was the first studio album--that was a studio album, or was that again live tracks with overdubs?
Pinske: It was all studio. As a matter of fact, it's David Logeman on that. I actually did some vocals on that. That was one that was pretty much all my baby. I think Allen Sides helped--you know what's so strange about that one? I think Bob Stone had kind of decided at that point that he was going to take a break a little bit. So he was kind of getting real fatigued from all the live, leftover 2-tracks, so I pretty much was left on my own on that. So we brought in Allen Sides to do some tracking with us. Allen tracked with me, oh, one or two songs, and Frank for some reason just didn't hit it off with Alan. I don't know, they just--I think Allen maybe was a little too opinionated or something like that. But nonetheless, you know Allen always did pretty good work. So on that particular album it was primarily me and Allen Sides did some tracks. And then Bob did some remixing on--oh, gee, that was probably only about four or five of the tunes on that album. This is when he started crossing over and getting a little more involved with the better quality remixing. The full multitrack stuff. The stuff that just wasn't sparse. That's when Bob started becoming part of the overall team. That was in '81. But that whole album was a studio album. We tracked the whole thing in there. We had Motorhead, I think, played a little tenor sax on that one, and David Ocker played a little clarinet. Came in in the overdubbing stuff. And Steve Vai, that was one of the first albums Steve Vai actually did some studio dubs on.

Mix: The Steve Vai audition story is quite well known--not so much audition, as he was familiar because he'd been doing transcriptions on a contract basis, is that right?
Pinske: He was doing transcriptions for, believe it or not, for $10 a page. Some people took $15 a page. And Steve made me always promise to never tell Frank how much time he spent on one page, because his transcriptions looked immaculate. The real true story on Steve is kind of interesting, because you'll hear variations. You'll even hear Steve's own version of it, which isn't even totally accurate. Steve was a young kid. I was in the studio setting up some vocal mics one day, and Frank had gotten back a transcription of a live cassette that he had sent Steve called "Persona Non Grata." And Frank came out there with the sheet, and held it up to me, and he said, "Look at this, Mark. You gotta see this. Look at the way he transcribed my guitar solo here. He makes me look like a genius." He did some triple-dotted eighth notes, or some darn thing that just looked immaculate. And Frank said he was just screwing around, but Steve made it look really like it was some elaborate thing. And Frank got a kick out of it. He said, "Yeah, he sent me his tapes. Come on in the control room." I was setting up a mic out in what we called "the yard," out there, where I was telling you about in the studio. I came in, and Frank put in the cassette, and Steve had a band called Morning Thunder, which was a garage band. And I heard all this Jimi Hendrix-type of whammy guitar stuff going on, and Frank said, "I'm flying Steve out here tomorrow." I thought, "What the heck would he fly another guitar player out?" the whole idea was, Frank decided--he'd lost a little confidence in his guitar playing. You knew about that, right?

Mix: No, I didn't.
Pinske: There's about a three-year period in there where he almost didn't play at all. And we did a lot of tours where he just sang, and Steve played guitar. Steve and Ray and Ike. Frank didn't do a lot of solos. And then later on, the fans got kind of picky about it. But his mind already, he was just trying to bring in another guitar player, and he was just going to do more ad-libbing and singing, and just kind of directing. So Steve showed up, and he

had this old beat-up Stratocaster. Jesus, I think he just turned 19 years old, he was nervous as heck. Came in the studio, and we went out there and Steve said to me, I was out in the studio with Steve, and he said, "You gotta help me get a guitar sound. And we didn't have any real elaborate guitar amps out there at the time. For some reason I thought he'd bring his own, or something. But we had a little Roland Jazzmaster, as a matter of fact. We cranked the thing up, and kind of got it swinging and feeding back. And Steve, "Yeah, I think this'll be OK, don't worry about it. I'll just play this." Because he wasn't being picky. We took this--I went in the control room, and Frank said, "Take the tracks from 'Persona Non Grata,'" is about an eight-minute piece. It's a pretty long piece. And he said, "Feed him all the tracks except my guitar, and we're going to have him play my guitar part." Which he had transcribed. And I kind of thought wasn't fair. So I looked at Frank, and I fed him the best mix I could--I gave him a pretty elaborate stereo headphone mix, as a matter of fact. And I said, "Steve, OK, just play along with it. Don't worry about it. Just play for however long you can. And then, whenever you want to, drop out." So I rolled the tape, I put it in Record. Steve started playing, and he played all the way through the piece. And Frank said, "My God, bring the kid in." So I told him to come in, and Steve came through the side door, and at the side door we have a little coffee maker, next to a little restroom there. And the door shut, and I was in between the two doors from the control room and where the coffee maker was, and I caught Steve there, and Steve said, "Man, I really screwed up, didn't I?" He was nervous. And I said, "No, man. Gee, I thought it sounded pretty good, Steve." So we brought him in the control room, and then Frank said to me, "Now put my guitar back on, and pan his guitar to one side, and my guitar to the other." And I remember distinctly panning Steve's guitar to the left side, panning Frank's guitar to the right side, or vice versa. I'm pretty sure that's the way it was, and we rolled the tape, and you couldn't hardly tell the difference of the two guitars. I swear to God. The bends, and the articulation, which pretty much told you how much time he spent on it, were--and Frank--probably the only time in my life I actually saw Frank's mouth just drop open. I turned around and his mouth was just dropped open. We listened to probably no more than about a minute and 20 seconds more of it, and Frank just said, "Stop the tape." I stopped the tape, he looked over at Steve and said, "Do you want to go on the road?" Honest to God. He looked over at him and said, "Do you want to go on the road?" So here was a guy that came from probably, I don't know, what? Making $120 a week, to $1,800, $2,000 a week. All of a sudden, he had a livelihood. Before he was 20 years old. And that was something I'll never forget. It really wasn't fair, I didn't think, but the kid held up pretty well.

Mix: So you're saying that around the time "Shut Up 'n Play Yer Guitar" albums came out, Frank had actually more or less cut back on his soloing?
Pinske: That was an inherent part of the fact that we were doing so much studio work. He bought a $3.5 million studio, we're listening to all these tapes, and he's producing albums. So he's not practicing his guitar every day, and he's not playing. Then we even went one step further, and I redid the whole "Baby Snakes" movie, which I remixed. And by the way, there's no credit on me on that, either. We never changed the film credits. But I did do the remix on all the whole darn film. We were doing some of this stuff from Baltimore, with George Duke and Napoleon Murphy Brock and Ruth Underwood. Some television show. We were redoing the sound on these videotapes. Because we were putting together a little thing called "The Dub Room Special." And we did a bunch of little video things. And Frank was playing unbelievable guitar on this stuff. And I remember him making a comment to me, saying, "Man, I'll never play guitar that good again." And he was serious. You know how you make a statement? But you kind of take it like, "Gee, he's kind of serious about this." And I think what happened is, it wasn't so much that he'd never play that good again; he just didn't have his chops up. He didn't have the desire to play quite as much, and

maybe the need to play quite as much. And he maybe kind of saw himself in a different role. So, what we did a couple of those tours and he wasn't really playing solos, some of the audience started writing in to the record company and stuff, and to Bennett Glotzer, his personal manager. I made a deal with Frank then. I said, "Look, Frank, if you want to start playing again, I'll take the Jimi Hendrix guitar down, and Seymour Duncan and I will put some new pickups in that thing, and we'll spice that guitar up." So he could play that, and one of his favorite SG guitars that he loved so much. I said, "Man, I'll make that sucker sing for you, man." You know, the next day I came in, and he was practicing guitar. And that's kind of what ended that thing.

Mix: And in fact, the guitar album is all later recordings, which you recorded, and is playing through those guitars, in fact, isn't it?
Pinske: Oh, yeah. There's a lot of stuff then. Later. We built a little equalizer in there. Midget came up with the circuit, that had a little parametric +/- 18dB 3-band parametric equalizer that we built into that Hendrix Strat. [Laughs.] And Seymour, I don't know, we went through all kinds of different pickup designs. That thing was really soaring, it was really singing. It was beautiful. It was kind of like, you know, I told you before, used to hang over the fireplace in the basement. He would walk down through the stairs, walk through the basement to get into the studio. So whenever he went back to the house, he would go through there. It was kind of like the mascot of the studio. It really meant a lot to him. It was just a burned-up Strat. But when we refurbished it, it was kind of just the aura of it all. There's two things I saw that meant a lot to Frank. The Hendrix guitar that was given to him, and then, unfortunately, the sad death of John Lennon. Which had a profound effect on him.

Mix: Which was in 1980, wasn't it?
Pinske: Yeah. We were in Berkeley. He almost didn't go on stage that night. We almost cancelled the show, I think. One of those things on the road, you know?
Mix: Yeah. I haven't got any more questions about YAWYI. As far as I can see, the bass is all by Arthur Barrow, right, and drums by David Logeman?
Pinske: Yeah. That was David Logeman, Artie Barrow. It was probably a pretty crude--my recording level skills weren't as good in those days, in '81, as they got later. It was a pretty bare album.

Mix: There's a lot on it.
Pinske: A lot of good songs. A lot of good vocals. We had Denny Walley come back in. We had Craig "Twister" Steward, as Frank called him. Matter of fact, I think I got an email from Craig "Twister" Steward the other day.

Mix: I've got a question about that, because on the YCDTOSA series, there's quite a bit of harmonica playing, which is never credited as far as I can tell. Was that Bobby Martin playing, or Ike Willis?
Pinske: Bobby Martin played a little bit, but a lot of that was Craig "Twister" Steward as well. We tracked a lot of stuff with Craig that we never thought we were going to use later.

Mix: On the studio albums. But the live playing must have been what, Bobby Martin?
Pinske: Yeah. Most of it, yeah.

Mix: I was just curious, because it's never credited.
Pinske: Yeah. It's kind of sad how--Frank's liner notes, from the original albums and stuff, were one of the treats.

Mix: Yeah. The first album I really had, I guess, was "Uncle Meat--"
Pinske: They were always funny.

Mix: And also he was the first person to really explain recording technology to the public.
Pinske: You know all those notes are on the Internet. They're all over the place. You can get all the original liner notes everywhere. I got links to some of them on my Web site, on my CD page. As a matter of fact, there's a link when you just click on one of my albums that I did for him, one of them takes you to a link that has a chronological credits of every album. Tells you exactly everything you want to know about every album. That can help you fill in some of the cracks as far as who did what. It's all been documented a million times.

Mix: I've got about 20 or 30 links, but I haven't actually stumbled across that one yet. But I will.
Pinske: Yeah, Valzemar or whatever his name is. One of my albums on the CD shelf on my home page has a link right to him.

Mix: I should have bookmarked you, and I haven't. You're. . .
Pinske: Markpinske.com. Or just pinske.com. WWW.markpinske.com. And mine'll come up. The home page is real plain. It just has my address on. Then there's a "CD Shelf 1." I always had an intention of putting a whole bunch of the albums I did on there. And just never kept up--

[Setting up next time.]

Mix: I've got questions for the later albums, but I haven't spent as much time listening to them. I don't have "Baby Snakes," for instance.
Pinske: "Baby Snakes" was kind of a--we did a picture disc on that.

Mix: "Thing-Fish" I've only listened to once, but I'll--
Pinske: Yeah. That CD, I almost threw it away. It's so sad. I've got the original lacquers, but . . . You get the gist of it all, but it's a lot of overproduced stuff. The "Them Or Us" came out real good. "Man From Utopia" is kind of an interesting album. That's one that Bob and I did together. I think they even spelled my name wrong on that one. That one's kind of cool. It had a combination of some--that was some of the higher-quality studio stuff.

Mix: Quite a bit of "The Man From Utopia" is live, though, isn't it?
Pinske: Oh, yeah. Frank did that on every album. We would do something from the studio, and then we'd turn around and do something live. And we would mix all the stuff together. He would have the habit of always going back and trying to grab something. He always seemed to think we needed to make a double album, instead of just a single album.

Mix: That's what kind of killed me, as a record buyer. I gave up around "Sheik Yerbouti." I had everything up to that point, but then I--
Pinske: Unfortunately, some of the albums would be fine as a two-sided album. They would have been just fine. You kind of wear out the--and then always segueing every song. Always segueing. It's like you're a prisoner from the time you drop the needle. And we spent so much time segueing. In some ways, the first cut of an album would sound better than what we did later.

[Setting up next time.]

When we did all those recordings, remember I told you we had something like 932 tapes after the first three months? Well, when you take a truck on the road for five years, you can imagine how many reels of tape there are. We used to have this joke that, we couldn't even listen to them all, and Frank would say, well, we're going to make albums until he dies, and then I'll still be making albums until I die. It was just kind of a little thing we did, because that is how long it would take to get through all of the tapes. A lot of it was just rehack. You don't want to listen to the same song 450 times.

Mix: But then, on the other hand, all the tapes were different, in the sense that the shows very rarely had the same set lists.
Pinske: Oh, no. He would do the set list about 15 or 20 minutes before the show. He used to look out at the audience, and he would call us all in the dressing room, and we would write the set list right then, before the show. He would decide by the mood of the crowd, and stuff, what he was going to play. And the band had to know 125 songs.

Mix: But were there suites? There is one section where they play four tracks in a row from "Them Or Us." "Charlie's Enormous Mouth. . ."
Pinske: We would segue that stuff all together. The hardest thing about the musicians--it was much harder being a musician than it was for me being an engineer, because the musicians would practice 125 different songs, in the soundstage, for weeks. We would go on the road, and then all of a sudden, a month and a half into the tour, two months into the tour, he would call one of the songs that they hadn't played the whole tour, yet. And he would write it down. They'd go, "Man, I hope I can remember this thing." I remember the musicians always telling me that. And I recorded cassettes every night. Even when I was in the truck, or in the house. We would take the cassettes back to the hotel rooms, and the musicians and I would listen to a lot of the shows. And then I would take comments from a lot of the guys like Tommy Mars, or Ray and Ike, or whoever wanted to come to the room and listen. And they would give me comments about how they might want to change their guitar sound, or their keyboard sound. We would work on--my whole goal was to work on trying to get it to sound the way they wanted it to sound themselves. And then working it in, of course, to what Frank wanted. We taped every night. We made cassettes every night. Frank would take the tapes a lot, and then when he didn't take the tapes, he would give them to me, or he'd say give them to one of the musicians. That's why there's so many live cassettes floating around.

Mix: And presumably you've tried you best not to let them fall into the hands of bootleggers.
Pinske: I did have a Halliburton stolen from me. This is one of the other things that kind of happened when I was in France. We stayed in downtown in Paris, and I had a little Halliburton briefcase. And I set it down to check in, and I turned around, it was gone. And I had like eight live shows in that thing. They were all just cassettes. But every one of them came out on a bootleg later.

Mix: So that's why some of the bootlegs really do sound like board tapes, because that's exactly what they are.
Pinske: That's what they were. Some of them were my board tapes. I didn't have anything to do with it, of course, but nonetheless, it couldn't be stopped. Some of them actually sounded pretty decent. Every once in a while you get one that was really good. It wasn't easy to make great-sounding cassettes, because you were really trying to mix for the house, mainly. And the house would sound a little bit different. But we got a couple of them in there that were nothing to be ashamed of.

DAY THREE – PART ONE

[Pleasantries.]
Pinske: Unfortunately, what Zappa got in the habit of doing is mix-and-matching so many things on a record. He would do a record of some old stuff, and then he would just all of a sudden throw a couple new songs on there. He never had--like I told you about "Thing-Fish." "Thing-Fish" was actually a really neat, slick, and trim kind of a show when we first did it. And then he kind of got into stretching it out by throwing in all those new versions of--different lyrics to some of the songs that were on YAWYI. Just making up stuff to kind of stretch it out. And I found that kind of being--not just as I look back on it, but as we were doing a lot of the projects, sometimes we would have like a really, really good two-sided album. And we'd end up making a double album out of it. And this is what Bennett Glotzer, which is his personal manager, always accused us of. We were always making double albums. And Frank, a lot of times, wanted to give his fans their money's worth. But like in the case of "Drowning Witch," for instance, it ended up being a lot better single album.

Mix: Did he assemble it as a double album, and then cut it back?
Pinske: No. Not on "Drowning Witch." As a matter of fact, we were doing "Crush All Boxes," that one album I was telling you about, [as] a double album, and then his manager said the record company only wanted a single album. So we kind of just shifted over and did "Ship Arriving Too Late" then.

Mix: Now I'm confused, because I thought "Crush All Boxes" was somehow connected to "Tinsel Town Rebellion."
Pinske: No, not at all. "Tinsel Town Rebellion" was a collection of all kinds of recordings from pretty much--a lot of them were before my time. We took recordings like--see, I overdubbed on a lot of them. I overdubbed all these vocals on top of them, like "Fine Girl" and a lot of pieces like that. We had backstage tapes from George Douglas, which was basically just the machine in the dressing room. I noticed when I was looking through all the albums that they credited George like on some of the original guitar albums. The guitar album that came out later, I did. But all the original "Shut Up 'n Play Yer Guitar" albums were collaborations of different tapes, just like "Tinsel Town Rebellion" sort of was. Which was really just a tape recorder in a dressing room that we rolled in every time during the show. And that was a whole different setup than the UMRK remote. So, when they say "UMRK remote," it wasn't really the UMRK remote then.

Mix: Zappa makes references to the guitar solos on "Joe's Garage," which he says were recorded on a 2-track Nagra, which only had guitar on it, and somebody would just turn it on for solos and then turn it off again.
Pinske: I think Claus Wiedemann had something to do with that. That was before my time, as well, when they were doing a lot of the Nagra stuff.

Mix: Then you had a 4-track out of the console, and then an 8-track out of console.
Pinske: Not necessarily out of the console. We did do some 4-tracks out of the console, but we ended up getting them away from the console, and putting some of them backstage. Claus Wiedemann originally took an 8-track, and then George Douglas kind of took over the 8-track.

Mix: And they were doing separate mixes, or they were taking submixes from you?
Pinske: It was a little bit of a combination of both. It was kind of like the baby--like the birth

of how we ended up doing things on a much more elaborate scale later. In the experimental stage, we were experimenting how to do it. The problem we had was, number one, we didn't have a remote truck, so we were really in a machine, so we were splitting off the signals in multiple ways. They might take a mix, for instance, a left and right mix of all the drums, and then they would take their own kick drum, and their own snare, and their own hi-hat. And I would give them a stereo pair of tom-toms, all the tom-toms, and a stereo pair of overhead cymbals. For a while, we even had the hi-hat in the stereo pair of cymbals. And then they would combine those down to just one stereo pair on the 8-track. So we were at the mercy at however well the blend was. What happened is, the monitoring conditions kind of got out of hand. We would stick a tape machine--say for instance we would be in a civic center or something--and there'd be a tape machine back in the dressing room. And then you set up a couple of portable speakers. Well, the monitoring conditions obviously weren't very controlled. So you would get variables between show to show, because there was not really a consistency of even where we were listening, into the stuff. But we would do the best we can. A lot of the times, Frank mainly wanted to get the solos and stuff like that. That's what he started out with with the Nagra. The Nagra kind of started out, in "Baby Snakes" movie--I don't know if you've ever seen the "Baby Snakes" movie . . .

Mix: I never have, no.
Pinske: Well, Adrian Belew's wearing a wax suit on it, and he goes backstage. And he talks through a mic that's on a portable Nagra, that was running this SMPTE time code on it, and he talks right in and goes something like, "I don't know why I'm doing this. I don't know how I ever got talked into doing this." And it was really kind of interesting, because you had to take the audience mics, you had to go backstage and take the Nagra recording of him talking into it and kind of have the audience sound in the background, like you're going backstage in an auditorium. So it was quite interesting. Frank got into that kind of stuff a lot. Like we did the airport tapes, and things like that. He'd have me record at an airport. I would record in motel rooms. We would set up a little portable--sometimes even a cassette.

Mix: Just any tape machine with a stereo mic, and you kind of wander around with it?
Pinske: Yeah. As a matter of fact, the first time I did the girl that we used on "The Torture Never Stops," I think we did it in mono, and then he had me rig his motel room in stereo, to do a better job the second time. [Laughs.] It was pretty funny. We got into some funny stuff. But what I'm basically getting at is, a lot of the recording techniques, and the amount of money we were spending and everything else, kind of evolved into saying, "Look, we just gotta do a better job at all this. We want better quality recordings, because we're missing some really good live performances here." And Frank's whole theory was, the band's never as psyched-up--what he didn't like is going out and doing a tour, then bringing the musicians into the studio. He claimed they were never as psyched-up as they were when they were on tour in front of an audience. And they would play these songs for three months on the road, and they come back and they just wouldn't have the pizzazz they did. They wouldn't play it as well.

Mix: As far as I can tell, "Tinsel Town Rebellion" and other stuff is done from tapes made out specifically, like a four-night stand at the Hammersmith Odeon, and a night at the Berkeley theater, and a night at Santa Monica.
Pinske: The Santa Monica Civic, we took a 24-track in on that one.

Mix: Right. So there's a lot of tracks that turn up with those recording dates on them.
Pinske: Tower Theater in Philadelphia, Santa Monica Civic, if I remember correctly. And

those tapes were done, actually pretty darn good, because we had a more elaborate miking setup on stage.

Mix: That was a real live-recording date, like "Live at the Roxy" or in New York. You had a remote truck and splits and all that, right?
Pinske: No, we didn't have the remote truck. No, not on those gigs. They were done in the Santa Monica dressing room, the auditorium concert in 1980. We didn't have our own truck until 1981. At the Roxy in New York, and at one of the other shows in New York, we did rent a truck. We had the Record Plant truck one year. I'm trying to remember what other truck we used. We used the Record Plant mobile one year, that Allen Sides helped out with. And there was a couple of times in there where we had the truck. But when we did the Santa Monica Civic, we didn't have the truck. We had a 24-track back in the dressing room. You'll see reference to that. There's kind of a mistake on a couple of the credits that were done later, I noticed when I looked on the Internet. Where they just said "George Douglas, UMRK mobile." It was no UMRK mobile. If you search deeper, you find it was on mobile equipment, but we moved it around and put it where we wanted. It was no actual facility. And they were pretty good recordings, some of those. They came out rather well. But keep in mind now, that "Tinsel Town" was the first real album that came out of the studio, so we took the live albums and then we sweetened some of them up, like in "Fine Girl," we added the vocals. We did one whole studio cut there, too, on that. In my opinion, "Tinsel Town" was kind of a conglomerate. It was a great album. It was kind of a potpourri of things. Kind of like what the cover looked like.

Mix: You said he spent 3.5 million on building the studio, which brings up the question, "how did he finance it?" As far as I know, Warners pretty much had him tied up. He must have had some of his royalties tied up.
Pinske: Most of that was all paid for before I got there. As you know, Frank was like a record machine. He put out products, one way or the other, whether it was through the companies. He had two bad experiences that he talked to me about a number of times, and I won't get into a whole lot of detail about them, with Bizarre and DiscReet Records. By the way, some of that harmonica playing you asked me about last time was actually Captain Beefheart. When I thought about it later, I realized what it was you were talking about. He started those those companies, and did a certain amount of investment in some other artists as well, Captain Beefheart being one of them, and both those companies pretty much went under.

Mix: Or disappeared along with Herb Cohen.
Pinske: Right. So by the time I got there, he had already made up his mind that he was going to do it differently. He was going to pay for his records, but cut deals with record labels to where the record labels would buy the product. And most of the deals we did, we were with Phonogram/Mercury when I started out with him, and we'd gone through Capitol Records and MCA. We did a big long stint with a number of different labels. CBS, obviously. CBS was so weird, because we did CBS--it was like two separate companies when you talk about internationally and when you talk about domestically. We weren't treated the same at all. But he would do a deal to where we would pay for the record, they'd reimburse him for all the recording expenses, but they basically would do distribution, and then he would give the record company 15 percent. So Frank ended up making, in those days, like $2.25 off each record sold. And that's unheard of. It was unheard of compared to what somebody like Dylan--we talked about him last time--would make 18 cents a copy. And Frank would always say, "You know how many albums you gotta sell to make the same amount of money? I could sell 400,000 albums, and you'd have to sell 3 million to make the same amount of money." That kind of thing. The logic

was that Frank knew business really well. So what I'm saying is, he kind of set a precedent in a way. He kind of started something that almost set an example to original artists all around the world. By having that kind control, he was able to take more money in, and not have to have all Platinum albums. Because he knew his music was off-the-wall enough, and wouldn't be played on radios and stuff like that, that he couldn't get that kind of volume. So he set up his business accordingly. He was very clever about it. He also--don't get me wrong--he made a lot of the money from a lot of the first albums, even before the lawsuits ever started. How he collected all his money, and how he saved it all up, and how he finally got enough money together to finance the studio, I don't know all the details of that, but I know is was just about paid for when it was built. And then when we got the settlement, of course, everything was paid for.

Mix: Three-and-a-half million for a studio, you'd have to make 35 albums at $100,000 in cost an album, to amortize that off.
Pinske: Well, the bulk of his money still came from live performances. He got paid well for performing, and also, he sold a heck of a lot of memorabilia. That whole Barfko Swill stuff, and Barking Pumpkin Records. Joe's Garage warehouse out there was just a regular--whatever you could put in the mail. T-shirts, you name it.

Mix: That came a little later, though, didn't it?
Pinske: Well, it came later in a bigger swing, but they were doing it all along in kind of a smaller scale. Most all the stuff was at a smaller scale, and we just got better at it as we went.

Mix: Do you know what led to him ending his relationship with Bennett Glotzer, who I think had had something to do with helping him out of his Warners troubles? Or maybe he was just a hired gun.
Pinske: That part I don't know. Bennett was pretty much his personal manager most of the time I was with him. Frank pretty much controlled the business. Let's be straight about that. But I know that Frank also had a big change of heart near the end, when he started getting a lot more sick. He cut a deal with Rhino Records, I think he got $22.2 million, or something like that, for the whole library. On top of the other money he had. Because he wanted to take care of the family and everything. And I think there was fall-outs as far as just the way they wanted to do business. Bennett, a lot of the times, got into things, and a lot of it really wasn't my business, but I would be there sometimes when they talked about it. Like I know Bennett got his percentage right off the gross. And the exception to that was, when we--the recording costs, and money we would spend recording--so when I built the recording truck, Bennett was quite upset. Because that money came off the gross, and then his 15 percent was lower because we were spending the money on the recording. I know for instance--like he would call me up--because it was just me and Frank a lot of the time, in the control room. A lot of times there was nobody else there--and Bennett would go--I think we had like $125- or $130,000 budget we set aside to do the "Drowning Witch" album, for instance, right? And I remember Bennett called me up, and we were over budget when we decided to do that extra song, "Valley Girl," which I told you about last time. He says, "You gotta hold Frank down. We're over budget. You guys already spent $130,000. You're on you're way to 140,000," when he looked at the money we were spending for the extra musicians singing, the union scales and all that kind of stuff. And I told Bennett, I said, "What do you suggest that I do? You got a guy that owns his own studio." It wasn't really me in control, he was just venting. So even though he vented that, he never vented about the $2.5 million that "Valley Girl" made. You know what I'm saying? I never heard about that. So, what I'm saying is, when you had a windfall like that, with

something that was that big of a hit, all of a sudden, his percentage turned into a larger-than-life deal.

Mix: You said you actually had a budget for "Drowning Witch."
Pinske: We tried to budget, yeah.

Mix: Is that all real expenditure, or was there a paper cost of studio time that you charged against--
Pinske: It was everything. I would keep, try to keep track, of accurate logs. Like for instance, if I went down to KenDun Recorders or Capitol Records or anywhere, we would have bills for all the mastering, all the time. I would have to sign off the receipts because I was the one there. Frank sent me on his behalf. So I had to keep track of all that. Sometimes we would get the bill, even though I would sign at the end of every session, sometimes we would get the bill, and the bill would be larger than the ones I signed off. So I kept track of all that stuff, and we added it all up. The price of the tape, the price of hours, how many hours everybody put in, the union scales, the basic things all had to--we kind of had to keep our hands on just to approximate where we were at there. It wasn't like it was a life-or-death thing, it was just that we would say, look, we don't want to spend any more than this on making this album. And that was always hard to keep down, because we would be working on multiple projects at the same time.

Mix: And then you would deliver acetates, or production master tapes to the record company, which would then actually give you--
Pinske: No, no, no. We never gave them the tapes. No. I would go cut, in the case of--depending on what era you're talking about, but I would go cut 27 sets of lacquers, is what we would do. Twenty-six or 27 sets of lacquers, and we would mail them all out to the different pressing plants. Like Belgium, we'd mail them to Belgium. We mailed them to South America. Whichever pressing plants we were doing.

Mix: And part of this is keeping control, and part of this is because you'd do the job better than they would?
Pinske: Well, he would never let anybody have his tapes. As a matter of fact, we would air freight the lacquers because, if the lacquers--you probably know that after 24 hours they start expanding and contracting. So you wanted to get them nickel plated as soon as you possibly could. Which was a problem when you're sending them around the world. And if they took too long getting there, they would expand and contract, and then you would have all this pre-echo, where the song starts before it actually starts. That kind of stuff would all come from the expansion and contraction of the lacquers. Later on, we moved into doing things at Sheffield, because we could just cut the metal masters right there ourselves, and we did all the metal parts ourselves. We'd send out mothers for stampers. And that way we had better control. And I think we--London Symphony was like--the better albums were pretty much like that. "Them Or Us," I think, was one of them. I'm pretty sure "Them Or Us" was somewhere around that time. When we started doing John Matousek. Isn't he the one who mastered that? Anything we did with John Matousek at Hitsville, we would take the masters, and I would go cut the metal parts over at Sheffield. And they would do what's called "groove sculpturing." When you had dust particles and things like that, that set up on there, they would shave them off, instead of just scrubbing them off with a brush. And you would have a lot less rumble and stuff. We took a lot of care, a lot of tender loving care to how we made the metal parts. And he paid for all that himself.

Mix: That was how he was able to go to the companies and just literally give them a distribution deal. Say, "Look, I've got a complete master, right down to the mothers."

Pinske: Right. And they basically had no expense in it. All they had to do was take 15 percent for distributing it, and they would get their money out of it. Providing it would sell enough. In a way, he kind of invented some of the ways of dealing with some of these companies, as a result of all the business things he had through. He learned a lot.

Mix: It seems there's always a good reason for what he did, and there's also some story as to what happened to him in the past that made him decide he needed a better way of doing it.
Pinske: One of the short stories he told me about DiscReet and Bizarre, which is like why people like the Grateful Dead and everybody else were struggling with these kind of things, was he would send records out. He tried to do his own distribution when you had your own record company. Let's say you send records out to, oh what, 2,000 record stores across the United States, and they take ten of your albums or twenty of your albums and they sell them, but they don't pay your bill. They pay Warner Bros. first because they want to get the next Doobie Brothers album, or whatever. His story was basically along the lines, Do you realize how many different laws there are, and how many different states, and how much it'd cost to get lawyers in every different state to just try to collect your money? It's a nightmare. So he learned from Bizarre and DiscReet that being your independent label isn't cool. It's insane. You don't get the proper distribution, really. There's mainly only three or five main distributors. In Belgium, the same pressing plant's used by Warner Bros. and CBS. Phonogram/Mercury, of course, is one of the big boys, so what he started doing is, he started playing cards with the big boys. And decided that he would go ahead and take his production so far, but when it came to distribution, he needed to get one of the big companies to do a distribution deal. And that all evolved off the lessons of the past that happened--a lot of them well before I came there, but he kind of talked to me about them sometimes when we were sitting around having pizza or something. And he would just give me why he does things a certain way. And it was kind of just teaching me a lesson. Which I found fascinating. Fascinating.

Mix: I'm curious about the old masters. I know there were three sets, and you worked on all of them.
Pinske: I transferred all of them originally.

Mix: This is all very confusing history, because the first question is, I take it that the stuff on Verve and MGM had gone out of print, but how come he didn't have those masters? Were they tied up in the Warner's suit?
Pinske: Yes. They were all tied up in the Warner's suit. Every one of them. There was, I don't know, some--the first 13 albums or something. I can't remember. Sixteen or so. All of them were tied up. "Ruben and the Jets," "Freak Out!" All of those were all tied up in the Warner Bros.' suit.

Mix: So until that was settled, he didn't get them back.
Pinske: He didn't have access to them.

Mix: And then you finally got them back, and discovered that, whether or not they were original stereo masters, many of them were unplayable, right?
Pinske: Well, "Freak Out!" was.

Mix: "Freak Out!" was . . . ?
Pinske: "Freak Out!" was stored where some air conditioner blew on it, and the oxide fell off. I used to keep logs of the different types of tape from 3M and whoever. Just about everybody, you always heard that Agfa or somebody had a bad brand of tape. Almost all

the companies had tape of one sort or another that wouldn't store very long. And if it's stored with air conditioning blowing right on it or something like that, it would dry out too much and the particles would just kind of fall off. That was one of the cases with the "Freak Out!" album, which led us to getting the 12-track--most of them were 12-track, 1-inch masters.

Mix: So you had to reconstruct "Freak Out!" from the masters?
Pinske: I took all the original masters, as a matter of fact, for all the box-set stuff. Even though we had 2-track masters, I took the multitracks and striped them across onto the digital machines.

Mix: So this was after 1984.
Pinske: It was a very long process. And I was doing this--the whole time, when we got the stuff back, Frank was just--he really wanted to preserve the stuff the best way we could. And the best way we could preserve it was to put it into a medium, and preferably a digital storage medium, that wouldn't go south and wouldn't spoil. So my main first chore was to archive everything, and transfer it onto digital, take the original tapes, of course, and put them away, and play them as few times as I could. And then we would mix from the stuff we transferred. And then I did digital backups. This is another thing a lot of people don't know. Chris Stone down at Record Plant had some of the Sony 3324 machines as well. And we used to do each other favors and stuff like that. I took his machine, I would let him use our machine. What we did was, we put together--he had a pair of them, so I would use his machine, sometimes I would let him use our machine, so he could just put a digital ribbon from one to the other, and make an exact digital backup. So when I striped the original, the 1/2-inch tape, on 14-inch reels, that runs at 30 ips on the Sony, when I striped the original ones, instead of us editing and rerecording and punching in and doing things on the originals, I made digital-to-digital backups of the originals, and the originals just got put away in the vault and they were never played. And then the backup of the original, which is basically a digital clone, so there was no generation loss, is what we would use to do all our work on. We did the same thing with the London Symphony Orchestra. It pretty much became the standard. We would take literally 200 reels, and I would digitally backup the original masters.

Mix: So you were working in digital on this restoration project long before you took digital on the road? Because in '82 you were still doing 24-track analog live recordings.
Pinske: Oh, yeah. All analog in '82. The digital machine didn't come along 'til '83.

Mix: And that's when this whole old-masters project started, more or less?
Pinske: Well, we had played with different versions of it. I had put some of it across on the Studer, I'd put some of it across on analog. But once we did the London Symphony, which was really what broke us into the digital, and once we compared the simultaneous analog recordings along with the digital recordings, we pretty much were ready to just throw analog out. As a matter of fact, you know what Frank said? He made us take the two Ampex machines out of the control room, and he said, "Out with the Dark Ages." [Laughs.] That's exactly what he said. "Out with the Dark Ages." So when he made the decision to switch over, that's the way he was. He always was wanting to move forward. Once he decided it was good enough.

Mix: From that period on, anything that was on an analog source was copied over to digital, and then you'd work from there?
Pinske: Right. And a lot of times what I did is I tried to spice it up. Like I would noise gate it. We had 85 different noise gates in the truck, and we'd move some of the gates in the

studio. I would gate out the noise, I would try to make the balance cleaner, so that we didn't have to deal with a whole bunch of junk after the balance was done. Because I figured, well, if I'm going to bounce this anyway, like a vocal, for instance, there's no reason for me to track across the hiss the whole time the vocal's not singing. So I would put everything through gates, and do a real, real careful, careful bounce to 'em. I would also match--do optimum levels, and things like that, because a lot of times the tracks wouldn't be at optimum levels. And I would try to balance things out so that what we'd end up with is basically a master tape that was a lot easier to work with.

Mix: The masters you were working from, were they more or less assembled in terms of were there lots of edits in the multitrack, or were they discrete pieces that then Frank would assemble into the resulting albums?
Pinske: No. Depending which we're talking about now. If you're talking about the old archive stuff, those were mostly all continuous reels. The live stuff, however, we razor-blade edited over to 2-inches.

Mix: No, I'm still thinking about the first three or four album reconstruction projects, like "Freak Out!" through "Lumpy Gravy."
Pinske: For me, you must realize, that's a lot later in my career, because I'd already had three or four years under my belt with Frank. So we kind of went back in time, and by that time we had had so many more recording techniques down, and we had improved so much in everything we were doing, that it was almost a good thing. But when we did get those tapes back from Warner Bros., they were all continuous reels. We didn't razor-blade edit those. We didn't dare screw around with those. We tried a couple 2-tracks, but they were too delicate.

Mix: Once you had the multitrack on digital and you could mix it any way you wanted, did you then reference the original albums and try and recreate the original mixes, or did you just mix it the best way that you thought?
Pinske: We did both. We would do both. As an example, I always liked the Mothers live at Fillmore. Remember, with Howie, and Flo and Eddie. Frank couldn't even remember where he got all the edits from to put that together. He had edited that thing silly. So when we tried to reconstruct that album, it was damn near impossible, because he couldn't even remember where he got what cut from. He edited together at the time, but when we played the different shows, it wasn't--it didn't fit. Certain parts and certain things they said didn't fit. So we'd have to hunt around and say, "Jesus, where's this next section?" [Laughs.] You're kind of right. In a way, we did get into a puzzle sometimes trying to find some of the missing elements when we tried to recreate stuff. And sometimes we just didn't find them. We were on the hunt for that thing in "Baby Snakes" for years. I think we finally found it at random, some little white tape in a box that was a Nagra tape. And sometimes the missing elements wouldn't just always be there, and Frank had to a lot of times go by memory.

Mix: It's "Fillmore East" and "Just Another Band From L.A." that's basically the same band a few months apart. Were they multitracks, 16-track recordings, or were they 4-tracks?
Pinske: Let me see. I don't remember that one.

Mix: They're generally considered to be not that great in terms of technical recordings.
Pinske: A lot of that older stuff, some of the stuff we only had 2-tracks. And some of them we only had 4-track. Because it was a conglomerate of stuff. The whole thing about it is, I'd almost have to go back a reconstruct each album, which would take way too much time. But I'd almost have to go back a re-live it because, like I told you, there was one album that was a 10-track 1-inch. Which is the only 10-track 1-inch that was ever existed. And the

12-track 1-inches were fine, but we would have some stuff on 8-track, some stuff on 12-track, one of the albums was a 10-track 1-inch, "From Cucamonga." And then there was a variety of stuff that would be on a 4-track and/or 2-track tapes. And sometimes the 2-track tapes were all we had. If that was the case, then I would bounce the songs across the best that I could. And I even did, even the "Freak Out!" one that was falling apart, I bounced whatever was good on it. We did everything from bake tapes in the oven that were sticking together, to--it was a stressful, painful amount of work. I did everything I could the best I could, with what you had to work with.

Mix: Which of these albums did you know from growing up? Were you a teenager when Frank's stuff started coming out?
Pinske: I knew the "Mothers Live at The Fillmore," because I laughed at that album a lot. But in general, I wasn't actually a Frank fan. When I auditioned, I wasn't all that familiar with so much of his work. And I think, in a way, that's what really helped me, because he didn't want a fan. He wanted an objective opinion, and it helped me. You can't help but become a fan of his once you work with him. But I wasn't a fan when I auditioned and when I first got the job. I liked that one album, but I always thought his stuff was really bizarre and off-the-wall. Looking at it from a musician's standpoint or whatever.

Mix: So when you came to reassemble "Lumpy Gravy" or "Cruising With Ruben and the Jets," it wasn't like this was your favorite album from high school or anything.
Pinske: No, not at all. In fact, that got me in trouble on the "Mothers Live at the Fillmore," because I knew that album word for word, and when it wasn't right, it bothered me. Nonetheless, we got around to most of it. Frank got a kick out of the fact that I actually at least knew one of this albums that well. But then, I went back and listened, of course, the whole time I was working with him, so that I could do my job better, and I referenced to the stuff. It's your job. You want to pay respect to it. And of course the fans know every damn bit of it.

Mix: There's a whole section of the Web devoted to the differences between the vinyl and the CDs.
Pinske: It was a drastic difference, unfortunately.

Mix: Presumably there are differences between the original vinyl releases and the "Old Masters" final releases.
Pinske: I know. And as a matter of fact, some of the bootlegs of like "Freak Out!" and stuff that we got from Italy, some of those sounded really good. Frank and I spent one day trying to find this one company, not so much to chew them out, but to figure out where the hell they got their artwork, and how they got the record to sound so good. Because some of those bootlegs were done very well.

Mix: In this case, these bootlegs were just pirated versions of existing catalog albums?
Pinske: That was one of Frank's pet peeves. All the time the lawsuit was going on, the only thing the fans could buy were bootleg versions. And of course, everybody in Europe jumped on the bandwagon and made bootlegs all over the place. There were bootlegs coming out of the woodwork. And some people would think that, when they bought the record, that Frank was getting money for it, but he never got a penny of any of it. And it was a shame. We tried to estimate, one time, just how much money he'd lost over that whole period of time, and there was no way of saying. It was all just an educated guess. And I think that had a lot to do with why he got the size settlement he did. Even though Warner Bros. didn't necessarily collect the money, but some bootleggers did. Unfortunately Frank didn't.

Mix: On tour, Ike and Ray were the two lead singers, right?
Pinske: Yeah. They both played rhythm guitar and sang.

Mix: Can you talk a little bit about their voices, the differences?
Pinske: Sure. They had very, very obvious differences in their voice. Ray was like a power singer. Could sing that real high voice, high-range stuff. And he'd belt it out. He could belt out anything, like a good, traditional blues, or "Illinois Enema Bandit," the kind of things that he would do. Ike was more like a character voice. I like to think of Ike more like when he was doing "Outside Now," or--his voice had kind of a character to it. Not just the funny stuff that he did like with "Thing-Fish," but the songs that he would sing. Unfortunately, Ike pushed his voice real hard, and his would be the first one to go kind of hoarse, and get a little bit rasp. So a lot of our recordings would have his voice a little bit on the hoarse side. And Ray was always the power singer that always held up. But when it came to being harmony-wise, it's really kind of magical, because they kind of knew right where to fall in around Frank. And when the three of them sang together, it was just a blend of it's own that was just terrific.

Mix: For a while you had Bobby Martin also singing vocals, right?
Pinske: Right. Well, there was Bob Harris, who was a friend that I got in at "Fine Girl," and then Bobby Martin came in after Bob Harris. And Bob Harris did all these high falsetto things. We used to call--remember, he had Roy Estrada in the original Mothers, who did all the falsetto stuff, and Frank used to say he ate clothespins for breakfast, because his high falsetto was so nasal. He used to just make a comment like, "he at clothespins for breakfast." [Laughs.] Bob came in with a real pure falsetto, and a real pure high range, and when Bob came in and started mixing with Ike and Ray, it was just a wonderful three-way combo. And that's where we built almost all these vocal harmony blends that we did on YAWYI and a lot of albums after that. Napoleon Murphy Brock came in and out of there for a short spell, too. And he had an even different kind of blend with those guys. But then when we auditioned for Bobby Martin, we went through a whole bunch of people. Once Bob Harris decided not to do the European tour, we had to find somebody that could take his place. Now, Bob played trumpet, keyboards, and sang. So when we ended up getting Bobby Martin, he played saxophone, keyboards, and sang. And Bobby Martin pretty much became a permanent fixture after that.

Mix: I think he played right up to the end, didn't he?
Pinske: He did. And he was very loyal. Plus, he did things like, he was the band director for Bette Midler, whenever he was off the road with us. He did other things on the side. He was a health freak, he was always very healthy, so his voice was always there, you could always count on him. He was a good keyboard player, and a pretty accomplished sax player as well, so he filled a lot of roles, and added a lot of interesting aspects to the live sound. And of course, he sang a mean "Whippin' Post" from the Allman Brothers. [Laughs.] But I think the audition, originally he sang something like, oh, some American ballad or something. It was always based off of, though--getting back to what you were talking about--the vocal blend. And Ike and Ray were almost always a part, a key part of that element. Because they fit with Frank's voice. Frank had a real low voice, and kind of a different voice, and not everybody's voice would blend well with his. A lot of times he would take the baritone parts, when they were singing four- and five-part harmonies.

Mix: On "Tinsel Town Rebellion", there are five guitarists listed. I guess that's 'cause there's two bands. For a while he had three other guitar players in the band with him. Steve Vai, Ray, and Ike. I wondered how you would mix for four guitars, or whether they arranged their parts so they weren't all playing on top of each other.

Pinske: Ray and Ike were always rhythm players. Ike was really a sparse type player. And Ray was kind of like the main rhythm player. You know how when you have a good rhythm guitarist, that holds the kind of body together. Ray a lot of times was responsible for playing the basic rhythm. The would give him an occasional solo, like in "Illinois Bandit" or something, I think he'd take a solo. Ike didn't usually solo. So Frank would normally solo, and then when we had Steve Vai, of course, he would normally solo, most of the time. So they weren't really conflicting with each other too much. The two rhythms were a little bit more sparse. We actually had a little bit more trouble with the multiple keyboards at some times. When we had Tommy Mars and Bobby Martin, for instance. And two rhythm guitars. Let's face it, a lot of this stuff would get real thick. That was one of the challenges about mixing any of Frank's stuff, is how do you keep the stuff separate? We tried to, a lot of the time, and you can notice this a lot on the vinyls. I'm not sure what Bob started doing on a lot of his remixing, but I know that on the original mixes that Frank and I did, we tried to create a more live feel. We would usually give a view of like the audience looking at the stage. Frank, for instance, would light the hi-hat on the right side because the audience looked at it from the stage. I had played drums in my life, younger, I always liked the hi-hat on the left side, like Chad Wackerman and most of the drummers would want it. But we would do our panorama, pretty much obviously the way Frank would want it. So we would build a panoramic view. Like the guitars may be on your left and the right, not all the way out, but somewhat panned in. The keyboards, of course, we would try to get as much of a stereo mix as we could on something like a string sound, fake brass or whatever, but we would do the keyboards in a kind of a pseudo-stereo. We got into doing this stereo-ising of just about everything. In other words, for instance, the bass guitar. We would use an 11-millisecond delay, or a 12-millisecond delay, a 9-millisecond delay, depending what key it was in. Then we would split the guitar--the bass up, so that it wouldn't pile up into the center. And that would keep the kick drum and stuff a lot clearer. So Frank would know--it was really ironic because--like if you were in the key of E, for instance, you may do 11 milliseconds, and some notes would cancel, because of the length of the sine wave. So you do one millisecond shorter, one millisecond less, it's have to be--depending what key you're in, you would set up the delay so that when they monitored them out, they wouldn't cancel each other out. So I would constantly do stereo referencing. And we would hit the Mono button--every time we did stereo separation like that, we would watch for two things. We would try not to be too far out of phase, because if you're too far out of phase, especially on low frequencies, the stylus would go nuts when you start cutting lacquers or whatever, and it would chew up the stylus, and you also didn't want to lose anything that would be in the mono image. Especially if you broadcast of FM radio, for instance. The multiplexes had a way of grabbing a hold of stuff, and what would happen is, the stereo multiplexes would take something that's too out of phase, and they would overreact, and you might listen to a song on the record and hear it on the radio and go, "Well, gee, what happened to the guitars?" The guitar levels would just about disappear. So we were constantly monitoring the phase correlation, and, of course, the relationship of delayed times. By doing this--say we would have a mono keyboard part. We could split the mono keyboard, with just a little bit of delay, put it at say, a panoramic view, like if you want to look at it at a clock, like nine o'clock to three o'clock, maybe put him at ten o'clock or two o'clock, and be able to get things out of the way, so that the lead vocal and the kick drum, and a few things that were total center image, would stay clear all the time. This is one of the tricks that we used with Frank all the time. Because he wanted his main voice to always be understood. We spent a lot of time trying to take--like what you said, a very thick sound--two rhythm guitars, two keyboards, almost always too much instrumentation, almost always very busy parts going on. A lot of clutter. And it was a real challenge. It was real frustrating from any engineering standpoint to try to keep all of that clear, and still have definition all that to survive. Especially considering the type of equipment and the

[end of side.] . . . listen to him. He was kind of a percussionist at heart, you know. [End of side.]

Mix: I guess Aynsley Dunbar's possibly my favorite, and the stuff on "Waka Jawaka" and "Grand Wazoo" just sound brilliantly balanced to me. It's almost unlike most of his later work, in that it isn't very "in your face" in terms of the drums.
Pinske: No. In fact, we got a little too carried away with that. We got a little too "in your face," and I didn't argue with him about it. I just did what he wanted. We both did that. Both myself and Bob, depending who was doing the mixes.

Mix: There seems to be some reference in the newsgroups to the possibility that the kick drum on the Helsinki concerts was kind of sampled in or something.
Pinske: It was. It's called a Disco Boombox. It was made by dbx. It's a little thing called Disco Boombox. That's what the name of it was. You could spit into it and a kick drum would come out. [Laughs.] You could basically send anything you wanted into it and a kick drum would come out.

We did do some triggering with Synclavier and some stuff like that, try to do that. It kind of got a little bit overdone in some ways. But we did manufacture drums out of--what I did was, I would take the original drums on the Helsinki stuff--I sectioned off what was originally just a stereo pair, and then I would take a graphic equalizer, for instance, and find the snare. And EQ everything else out. And then we would use that ridiculously sounding EQ that would spit every time the snare played, and I would externally trigger, using a gate and an external trigger, we'd externally trigger maybe a sample of a good snare that we recorded in the studio. And we tried to make it sound a little bit more real. Because a lot of them sounded just horrible. A lot of them didn't have any drums on at all. They were just a ring-y room. And we tried to give them some definition. And it was real easy sometimes to get a little bit too carried away, and get the proportions a little too up front, or too far back. I think the ultimate drum sound that we ever had was on the "Man From Utopia" album.

Mix: Which is part live, part studio?
Pinske: No, that's all studio drums, pretty much, on that one. Like "Cocaine Decision's" an all-studio track.

Mix: And that's all Chad?
Pinske: Chad Wackerman, oh, yeah. That was when John Goode--we spent three days tuning the drums. And it was just wonderful. Just wonderful. We did get good drum sounds live, like on the "Them Or Us" album and stuff like that. One of the reasons why I like talking about some of the newer albums is because we made breakthroughs. We got better and better at the recording once we put the microphones inside the drums, and we had John Goode tuning them, the live recordings got tremendously better. After '81, '82 got better than '81. And '83 was better than '82. Every time we went out, we did some improvement.

Mix: Whose mics were you using inside the drums?
Pinske: All of our own. We had--depending which ones you want to talk about, but we used AKG 451s inside of the tom toms. We originally developed a Randy May system, which he made, that had SM57 capsules. But what I did is, I made a deal with Randy to mount them into a different location so we could put the longer condenser mics in there. And we had an endorsement with AKG, and I got like $38,000 worth of AKG microphones, that they gave them all--they supplied all those. We put an SM57 Shure inside the snare,

on the top head and the bottom head. We had two capsules in that. All the other toms, we put AKG 451s and 452s, which had the roll-off and the 10- and 20dB capsules built in them, about three quarters of an inch underneath the top head, so we could get a good stick sound. But the head itself would filter out the leakage of the cymbals. And this allowed us to get a real nice percussive tone. And being as how it was in the drums, you would get the shell sound surrounding it automatically. And depending where you ended up placing it. We ended up placing it about two inches, two or three inches from the side of the shell, so that it wouldn't ring too much. And we experimented with the placement. This is what I'm saying. We experimented with the placement and the capsules, and the types of heads we used, even, over long periods of time, until we just got this really wonderful, kind of out-of-the-can tom sound, that sounded like something you might have miked up in the studio and spent two days tuning. So we ended up getting real good tom tom sounds that way. I would use AKG 414s on the overheads. Later on we went to the PZM--the Plexiglas--we had these Plexiglas dome mics that Ken Wahrenbrock made for us that we used on overheads. A variety of different hi-hat mics we went through. Normally we would use an AKG 452 on that. The 452's a really interesting capsule mic. It was one of the only mics in the world where you had the preamp in the canister, and you could unscrew the cartridge. And you could put different cartridges, different types of capsules on it. But the neatest thing about it is, you could put an elbow, a flexible elbow in there, and you could also put 10-, 20-, or 30dB pads, and because of this, you could pad the capsule, between the capsule and the preamp, so the preamp wasn't overloaded. As you know, most condenser mics have their pad after the preamp, which doesn't do you any good if the capsule's overloading the preamp. And in the case of something like a drum, that's real loud, you really kind of need to pad it between the capsule and the preamp. So this is one of the reasons why we were able to get away with an actual condenser mic in the toms. And then of course the benefits of it were--kind of speak for themselves, because you have that hi-fidelity tone that only a condenser mic can give you.

Mix: What did you do with the kick?
Pinske: The kick drum we would use two mics. In fact, it was a double-miking technique that we actually developed with Jonathan Moffatt, that John Goode and I experimented with when--oh, geez, I don't know if it was when he was first getting ready with Madonna, or if it was the "Thriller" tour. We tried these combinations of a AKG, a D-112, and an SM57. And you put them out of phase from each other. The SM57 would get the center beater noise, so it was more centered. And the D-112 would be aimed toward the side of the shell, so that we would get the low frequencies off the shell.

Mix: Are they both inside the drum?
Pinske: Yeah. Both inside the drum. Mounted inside the drum. And what we would do is, you'd blend them together, to where, if the 57 cartridge out of phase with the AKG, you could blend them together to a certain point, where you would have a nice, solid low end and a real punchy high end at the same time, without cancellation. And you kind of lock it into that kind of position, and you almost had--it really worked well as far as gating and everything else was concerned, because it had--when you gated it, it would have the full low end and the full high end that you wanted. And it kind of started out already with such a good sound, that all you had to do was fine-tune the EQ a little bit. And we developed that system. I think Randy May started using it later. I think he sold his systems that way. I think he still does today, as a matter of fact. I think he still uses the--you know, when you buy a Randy May, if you have Randy May outfit your kick drum, he'll outfit it the same way that John and I did. So we fine-tuned. We started it off with Jonathon Moffatt, but we fine-tuned it with Chad Wackerman. And this gave us a real consistent kick-drum sound.

Mix: Going back again to YAWYI, which was the next album after "Tinsel Town Rebellion", right?
Pinske: That's the first studio album, mm-hmm. All studio album.

Mix: Even third movement from "Sinister Footwear?"
Pinske: We played all that in the studio. "Sinister Footwear" was put together on a thing we called "Squidget," which was a nickname for Midget, which was a big E-mu thing that we did. And we performed it all, yeah, we performed "Sinister Footwear" all in there.

Mix: Then the band went out and did bits of the album on stage live, because I know on one of the live YCDTOSA, there's "Society Pages," "I'm A Beautiful Guy," "Beauty Knows No Pain," "Charlie's Enormous Mouth," all in sequence.
Pinske: Oh, we did those tour after tour after tour.

Mix: Whereas Zappa made the point that they were put together with monstrous overdubs and crazy edits, and that was half the fun, was trying to get the band to do all the edits.
Pinske: Well, yeah, segues, basically. He would do that all the time. They weren't done necessarily in any of that kind of order. We did that particular tour, we paid a lot of attention to YAWYI. But after that tour, when we went into other tours, it was more like just kind of revisiting it. Like one night, one session, we would do two or three of the songs on there. We never actually did all of those songs together again, for the most part. He would have a habit sometimes of doing "Jumbo Go Away," and "Suicide Chump" or something, or "Charlie's Enormous Mouth," that he would kind of just want to stick in there in some kind of special segue.

Mix: That was the last album Arthur Barrow was on, I guess. I guess he shows up later with "Tink Walks Amok." But that was an old track.
Pinske: Tink, yeah. Tink was his nickname. "Tink Walks Amok" was--he would come in the studio and overdub. Artie was the one who overdubbed a lot of the forward bass parts on "Ya Hozna" and "Won Ton On." He would come in every so often and play a little bit in the studio for us. Him and--we even got Patrick O'Hearn coming in there and playing stand-up bass one time, which was a real thrill for me. It was a real thrill for me to get together with, when we got Jimmy Carl Black back in, and Motorhead. Just being able to record with those guys, that I hadn't recorded with before. When they came back in to do something, it was just a real thrill for me to be able to be a part of that.

Mix: I guess the three albums that Warners put out, after "Live in New York," "Sleep Dirt," "Studio Tan," "Orchestral Favorites," they only came back to you after the Warners suit was settled, right?
Pinske: No. I'm trying to remember those.

Mix: Because "Studio Tan," which was an instrumental album, wound up with Thana Harris, Bob Harris's wife, she's overdubbed on "Spider of Destiny,"--
Pinske: I know what you're talking about now. That was on "Sleep Dirt." What had happened is, Frank had never--we worked quite a bit with Lisa Popeil, tried to sing those songs. And Lisa kind of almost got it. Frank would always say, "Almost, but not quite Boy George." But he just never was totally sold on her voice. And he was really frustrated, because every once in a while, when we tried to work those recordings, because he always wanted to finish them, so we'd pull them out from time to time and get somebody to sing on them. Well, I made a suggestion to him that Bob Harris's wife sang really well. So Bob and Thana came up to the studio. I called them up and they came up and they sang a little duet for Frank, a cappella, and he recognized something in Thana's voice that he

really liked. So we gave Thana a chance to sing on that stuff. And she was--Bob, of course read music perfectly, but Thana wasn't necessarily a music reader, so we let her take some of the tapes home, and then had Bob work with her on--because you know they were not exactly easy things to sing. And she came back in and we tracked them, and Frank just loved her voice. So we got her singing all that stuff. "Spider of Destiny." "Flambé." She did a great job on "Flambé." And I tracked her voice on all of that stuff, but we didn't necessarily mix it at that time, but we did have it in the can, so to speak. We had the tracks done. I think Bob did a lot of the remixing on that stuff, if I remember correctly. I mainly just tracked all the vocals and got a lot of it in the can. We did rough mixes and stuff.

Mix: Looking at the album cover, it says, "Copyright 1979 and 1991, Barking Pumpkin," so that kind of implies that it was--'79 was obviously the original release, and so it didn't come out again until '91.
Pinske: It didn't come out until '91, but we finished all that stuff in about, oh, that must have been '83, '84. When they got tired of Lisa, we tracked Thana. In fact, we did some mixes then, and put them in the vault along with the "Crush All Boxes" stuff that I never saw again. And I know that Chris, what's his name? Skip Clouseau? The engineer that they hired after both Bob and I were gone?
Mix: Spencer Chrislu?
Pinske: Spencer, yeah. His job was to take a lot of that stuff that we had in the vault and recompile a lot of that stuff. He would just take stuff that we had done with Frank over all these periods of time, and try to take a lot of the stuff that we meant to be released. Like they did that John Lennon tape on one of the albums. And Frank always said he was never going to release that. Because he always felt it was taking advantage of John. But I remember doing three or four mixes of the 16-tracks of "Baby, Please Don't Go." It was a great live moment. Except when Yoko would squawk in the background. We'd always joke about that. But John Lennon sitting in at the Fillmore, man. It was unbelievable.

Mix: There's also a note on some of the Web sites to the effect that "Orchestral Favorites" wound up with the stereo image reversed between the LP and the CD. Do you know anything about that?
Pinske: There was some serious mistakes made on some of the mastering. I don't know if somebody just got too tired, or what happened on that. But I know when Bob ended up redoing some of those CDs, see he wasn't aware, because I had left, Chad and I had left, oh, what was it, in '87, and went to work with Men at Work. We went on tour with Men at Work, Chad Wackerman and myself. So Bob was kind of left to do a lot of that stuff for Rhino, and he wasn't really there when we did a lot of the original stuff, so he was just kind of flying by the seat of his pants, and just doing it whatever way he felt like doing it. Unfortunately, what they did do, I think, is I think--in his defense--I think they put him under a lot of pressure, and he had to come up with a big library really quick. And as you know, when you've got a library as big as Frank's, and you're just supposed to all of a sudden take all these masters and make CDs out of them, they probably ran a lot of them through what's kind of a normal compression setting, or something like that, and just kind of passed a lot of them through real quick. And that's what a lot of them sound like, too. They got mastered too quick, basically, with not necessarily all the best interests at heart. Which we had when we were doing each project originally. It was only that album we were thinking about. So I think when they started doing those CD releases, they kind of got--I think Frank used to use the term "homogenized." Or "cheese food." They ended up kind of sounding all too--thrown together in a way. Not to mention that, when we did have 2-track analog masters, we did so many different varieties, whether we had Telefunken C4D on some of them, not too many of them, and then we had Dolby encoded. And then we had

half track masters that had no noise reduction, well all of those analog tape ones that weren't done on digital suffered from being stored so long. So I imagine that the original dynamic range, and the tone of the cymbals and everything else all suffered by the time he ended up trying to remaster some of it. Which is kind of a shame. Because some of that stuff should have been archived that wasn't, after I left, which is stuff I hadn't gotten to. Should have probably been put into a digital medium immediately, in its original shape. See, my theory was this: If you take the original tape, and you put it into a digital medium, as close as you can, as well preserved as you can, you can always crew with it later. But at least you have the original recording, the way it was. Preserved in the truest sense of the fashion of the way it was done originally. Because there's always something there that comes out. And if you screw with it too much when you do these transfers, you end up losing al lot of the essence of the original recording. So I always tried to transfer stuff in its purest form, and then just screw with it later when you mix it.

Mix: Got any stories about how Scott Thunes and Chad Wackerman wound up in the band?
Pinske: Chad auditioned. And we actually auditioned 31 drummers. We had auditioned him twice. We couldn't find a drummer to replace Vinnie Colaiuta. Scott, however, when we auditioned for him, Artie Barrow had left--actually, he came in, too, at the same time, we had Jeff Berlin in there for a short time. We never made it on tour with Jeff Berlin, but Jeff Berlin was in there playing with Vinnie Colaiuta. Both of them decided they wanted an enormous amount of money, and special treatment, and all this kind of stuff, which didn't kind of fit in to the book. And I think Vinnie, to Vinnie's defense, he also got a lot of contracts in town, playing on television shows, and film soundtracks, and that kind of thing. He was pretty much a hired gun around L.A. so he had some very good paying jobs with lots of royalties and stuff.

Mix: Did the band make money when they were working for Frank? They were paid sensibly, presumably, but were they paid--
Pinske: They were paid very well. They made money when we went on tour very well, and they made money when we did session work. But keep in mind, I was the only one on salary, so when we came off the road, a lot of the musicians'd have to go on unemployment or something. They didn't get salaried around the year. They only got salaried when we traveled, or when they did studio work, they got paid. So a lot of them really wanted to do studio work. Well, unfortunately, more of the live recordings we did meant that there would be less studio work. Because we would use a lot of the live tapes, and we might bring somebody like Chad in, or somebody to do some overdubbing, like Ed Mann, or Artie Barrow. But for the most part, most of the overdubbing was done for vocals with Ray and Ike and Bob Harris, or whoever. And of course, Steve Vai was the master of overdubs. He would just sit right next to me at the board, and we would invent guitar parts. [Laughs.] And he could play anything. It was unbelievable. That was a really joyous time on that. But the musicians got paid pretty well. Not millions of dollars, but thousands of dollars a week. Plus they got their per diem and their expenses all covered. It wasn't like they weren't paid well. But as you know, if you're making $2- or 3,000 a week on the road, and then all of a sudden you come off and you're getting nothing, it doesn't take long for that to just dissipate. And with guys like Bobby Martin, he would have another gig lined up. We'd come back, and he'd go out with Bette Midler. And some of the other guys. And Bob Harris went and did Warren Zevon, and some of these other people. So the real smart guys would go out and do some other tours. And of course, Chad Wackerman would play with Allan Holdsworth, I did one Alan Holdsworth album, "Road Games," with him. He would go out and play with Allan Holdsworth all the time. Not to mention different jazz gigs and stuff like that. So most of those musicians would keep themselves busy.

Mix: Scott Thunes, was his first thing doing the bass overdub on "Valley Girl?" Oh, no, you said already, it was Artie Barrow who did that, wasn't it?
Pinske: No, no, no. I think "Valley Girl," I think was Artie, wasn't it? Yeah, that was Artie Barrow. Yeah. Arthur Barrow played the bass on that album. No, Scott's first thing wasn't overdubbing. He came in about the same time Chad Wackerman came in, to do live bass, to do live gigs.

Mix: So in '81, it looks like.
Pinske: No. Scott would have been later than that. We went to the European leg, maybe. Let's see, when did Vinnie leave? I'm trying to remember, because--

Mix: Vinnie left and came back again, right? Because David Logeman started the tour in--
Pinske: Actually, as a matter of fact, you may be right, because what had happened is, '82 is more I think when Scott came in, because Scott did play on the "Drowning Witch" album, and that's where Artie Barrow kind of phased out. See, Artie went and worked with Giorgio Moroder, and Artie and I did a couple things together, too, by the way, on the side. When he was doing the "Flashdance" movie and that kind of stuff. And Artie went and played keyboards for Giorgio Moroder down at his studio, and he kind of got pulled away to do film soundtracks and stuff. He wasn't like quitting the band, or anything, he just had other stuff he was doing. So Scott kind of came in at the end of '81 and then '82. Right. That's when he came in. He came in pretty much right around when Chad did. Because I know we were making this joke about having three 21-year-olds in the band. Three 20-year-old and 21-year-old. Both Scott--you had Scott Thunes, you had Chad Wackerman, and you had Steve Vai, and they're all young guys.

Mix: How old were Ray and Ike? 20s?
Pinske: Now you got me. I think Ray was pretty much my age, and Ike was--Ike was young, too. Ike was young when he started with Frank, but Ike was a few years older. Like when I did the first tours with Ike, we were always kidding him, because he always wore a hat, and he was like the kid of the band. And then, of course, once Chad and--that was when we had Vinnie and Tommy Mars and everybody, and Ed Mann, but once we got off that European tour, and the other guys came in, well, Ike wasn't the kid anymore. So he was three or four years older than them. And then Ray, I think, was another three or four years older than Ike. Kind of between Frank and Ike. He didn't show his age, though. He wore his age very well.

Mix: How old are you?
Pinske: I was born in 1949.

Mix: So you're older than me.
Pinske: I'm older than you are, probably. And probably ten or twelve years younger than Frank. At that time, anyway, I was pretty much in my prime, but 51-year-old.

Mix: I know, it creeps up on you, doesn't it?
Pinske: Yeah. [Laughs.] I remember this stuff like it was yesterday, though. Because it was such--it was such a joyous job. I enjoy what I'm doing now. Now I'm general manager of two divisions here at Peavey. They're both professional divisions that do professional core products, and also professional digital DSP products.

Mix: When did you start at Peavey?
Pinske: I started at Peavey two years ago. Just a little over two years ago. I came up here and interviewed for a job. I had built a studio down in Florida, with some of the money I'd

made with Frank and whatnot. The studio's still there, Skylab Studios. There's a link to it from my site. My ex-partner there is running the place now. I still have some equipment in it, but I'm pretty much not involved with the studio at all. I got soured out on doing all the studio stuff. Especially doing more amateur recording, you know what I mean? Building a studio out of the way in Florida was not the greatest idea I had. I went back out and did a lot of touring. I went out and toured even in 1995, with Terence Trent D'Arby. And I'd go out and do some tours every so often, just for fun. Steve brought me back out with David Lee Roth in between on one tour, the "Eat 'Em and Smile" tour. So every once in a while I'd go out and do some tours, but I was mainly doing studio work, and I just, to tell you the honest truth, I got so beaten up by recording so much. I lost track of how many albums I did. The last time I counted was somewhere around like 160, 184 albums. Not that I wouldn't want to take my name off the first 20. But I had done a lot of death-metal albums, a lot of rap albums, stuff like this that came through. Every so often some good stuff would come through. Like with Tico Torres from Bon Jovi came and recorded down there, on Al DiMeola's percussionist Gumby Ortiz's album. And every once in a while we'd do a good project. I got to do River Phoenix, before he died. I did all his recording for him. And I had spurts in there that were a lot of fun. But for the most part, I just got saturated with it. I started listening to talk radio, and I got real tired of the music business, and I decided I'm just not going to do any of this sound stuff any more. So at that point, I kind of went back to my other roots, that I talked to you before, when I worked at Quad-8 electronics out in California. And I ended up running a manufacturing line there, and I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed working with audio product, because audio products is what I been around all my life. The touring gear, speakers, amplifiers, processors, and of course being with somebody like Frank, you were always trying to stay on top of the latest, newest digital processors and stuff. So my knowledge of always working with the latest, greatest gizmos, that kind of started very seriously, and having a chance to experiment with the most expensive stuff, kind of brought me in to where I wanted to be able to help design some products, use my background, and see if I could help manufacturers bring some stuff out that's a little bit more hip. And a little bit better quality that the real, true engineer, or consultant, if you will, or contractor, would really appreciate. Being able to have stuff that might have a little bit better quality, a little bit finer tuning increments, things for doing time aligning, whatever. So I was able to get involved with Peavey because they had a couple new divisions that they were developing. Architectural Acoustics, and Mediamatrix. Well, Mediamatrix is pretty much well on its way. It does all the main stadiums, and the Olympics, and House of Representatives, and this kind of stuff. It's all digitally controlled routing systems. And it's got a pretty good reputation. But Architectural Acoustics needed some help, so I came in and helped them design some speakers to go after EAW. I designed some things, some different amplifiers, some new amplifiers that were very good amplifiers that would give you a lot more power for lower price. Things that would be competitive in the marketplace. I really kind of got my teeth into it, and things went well the first year and a half, so they kind of promoted me up. To where I was general manager of the whole architectural acoustics division, and then just recently, about two months ago, they put me in charge of the media matrix division as well, so now I'm over all the DSP development, as well as the regular analog core products. And this is really kind of a fun challenge for me. You could tell by talking to me that I'm able to use a lot of the chops that I did in the past and put it into a product that some other young engineer that's like me ten, twenty years ago that could probably blow my socks out of the water, may get some piece of equipment that I helped design or helped bring to them, and really appreciate it. I do little things, like, we got a DSP device we call the Digitool now, that's only going to start shipping in about another month, where you'll hear about it, you'll see it, we advertise it in all the magazines starting now, but it's a DSP device that isn't like a lot of them you buy. You know how you buy a multiprocessor, and it doesn't have the increments you want.

You might have a reverb setting maybe 1.2-second delay or 800, you go, "I want something between this." And you go the lesser of two evils. The setting you want isn't really there. So I put out a device that does all of this stuff, where the equalization you can adjust one Hertz at a time. So if you have a ring at 1627 Hertz. No screwing around. And it isn't until somebody gets their hands on it and say, "Wow, somebody really thought of this. Somebody's giving me a tool now that I can use, that wasn't like this other thing I've always had to put up with. I can go to the exact settings on my compressor, on my noise gate, on my equalizer, on my delay." Delay, for instance, on this device, goes up to 5 seconds, increments of 1 millisecond at a time, and fine tuning at 999 milliseconds--microseconds. So if you want to time align a pair speakers, you can get right down to the exact microsecond. Now somebody won't appreciate that until they're actually doing it, and they'll say, "Oh, man, I don't have to jump 10ms up or 10ms down, I can actually set it exactly where it needs to be, to where the phase matches up." So I kind of was able to get those kind of things kind of off my chest. You know how you have that chip on your shoulder all those years, and now I'm able to put some of the things I learned into a device. And I find it very rewarding. They're giving me good support. Allowing me to do some things. You may say it's an overkill, or an off-the-wall, but when you're a professional, such as yourself, you know we have special needs, right? [Laughs.]

Mix: Now you're back in a management role--two divisions, and you're working with designers and manufacturing, marketing, and pricing.
Pinske: The whole cigar. Being the general manager, I'm over all of it. But I kind of get to go around assembly lines if I want to, and sit down with the engineers and knock out everything from the looks to the--this whole new device I'm telling you about, this Digitool is 8 in and 8 out, it's a device that had everything from noise gates to parametric EQs to compressors, and the whole thing's going to sell for 800 bucks. So we're talking about something that's revolutionary.

Mix: Are you going to debut it at NSCA, or before then?
Pinske: Oh, NSCA we're going to demonstrate four of them, in a big demo room. We're going to have it, and we have our own, I also developed a thing called the Freak Out, which is a feedback eliminator. But it's way more sophisticated than your typical Sabine product. If you put a whole bunch of filters in on Sabine product, and then you talk through it, your voice'll sound one way, and you hit the filters in and it sounds like somebody put a hand over it. What we did is we came up with some real sophisticated algorithms with 16 separate filters that only filter out the necessary marginal part. It's only 3 dB needs to be filtered out. Once you program it, you hit the filters, and you don't actually hear a difference in tone, and it works so fast you don't every really get a squeal. You get nothing more than a chirp, just sticking a microphone right in the speaker. So we had some of our best algorithm designers spend, oh, Lord, eight months alone just tweaking the algorithms on this thing. So we're real proud of it. It'll be a device you get for a couple hundred bucks. Some of those kind of things are going to be, hopefully become used a lot, and make a difference.

Mix: You stopped working for Frank in '87, because you moved on, or you got bored, or do you want to talk about it?
Pinske: A couple of different things. He wasn't really planning on doing any more touring, even though he ended up going and doing the '88 tour, he wasn't really--he started to get a little bit ill, but the main thing is that we just kept recycling a lot of the old tapes, which as you know went on for years even after I left, and releasing the same old songs, and the same old things. And I had a chance to make a considerable bit of more money, is what

happened. I went and worked with Men at Work, and then I went and hooked up with Bobby Brown and Bel Biv Devoe.

Mix: As engineer, or live sound?
Pinske: I went and did live sound with those guys.

Mix: And you could make more money?
Pinske: It was great. They paid me a huge amount of money, and I just flew out and did the Budweiser fest with them. A friend of mine called me up and said they needed a paratrooper, they'd gone through something like five or six sound men. And the New Edition was having trouble, and they needed somebody that could go to these different shows and work different systems. Like I would go into a fair and there would be a Showco system, or Audio Analysts or Clair Bros. They didn't travel with their own sound--the systems were all waiting there for them.

Mix: This was for New Edition?
Pinske: Yeah. The first thing I did was, Chad and I went off on a little tour, we went down to Australia and worked with Men At Work. We did that for quite a while. And then right when I got off of that tour, I was down there like 12, 13, 14 weeks or something, we were down there, and then this production manager that I used to know on the road called me up and said that New Edition needed somebody to come out and do some stuff with them, and I went and did them off and on for the next two-and-a-half, three years. And I also went in the studio with them. I did some recording with them. And then I did--Bobby Brown was pretty much asked to leave the band, and then he did his own "King of Stage" album, so I went and did a "King of Stage" tour with Bobby Brown. And got to know those guys pretty well. Then what I did was, we were down in Florida, and I went back to Gainesville, Florida, which is where I went to college, originally, and I built a studio there out of some of the money I'd saved up, and kind of overspent building a studio, which is now called Skylab Studios down there in Florida.

DAY THREE – PART TWO

Mix: How much did it cost?
Pinske: $880,000 we put into the studio. It has a Sony digital 24-track, of course. A lot of the stuff that I had used with Frank and all that.

Mix: Going back to Frank, how do you spend $3.5 million?
Pinske: That was a number that came out of the air that I was told that the studio cost. I think the bulk of the cost was Rudy Brewer, who designed the studio, he'd just done a studio for Captain and Tennille, or somebody like that. That was a real popular thing. And then George Augspurger also got hired to do some redesign in it. But he had all the most expensive mics, the most expensive equipment, the most expensive foundation, a floating piston underneath the control room. The whole building was done "spare no expense." So it was really quite elaborate. In fact, the studio was unbelievably elaborate for a privately owned studio. It was more like something you would see at the brand-new opening commercial studio.

Mix: It's kind of puzzling, because he'd had that Studio Z in Cucamonga that he got from Paul Buff, and then he lost that--
Pinske: Down on Cucamonga Boulevard? That wasn't really his studio. Paul Buff and Les Paul, I think, were in that. Frank did a lot of recording, and was directly involved with that.

Mix: It would seem the last thing he wanted to do was be a studio owner again. But at some point he must have figured that rather than paying Village Recorders and KenDun all this money--
Pinske: That was a lot of it. The bills were enormous. I see what you're getting at. Basically, he wanted to have complete control, and he wanted to have freedom of how much time it took for him to do something the way he wanted to do it, and do it right. Instead of always having to do it under the gun because he's getting the charge of this enormous amount of money, on a per-hour basis. Like when we remixed the "Baby Snakes" album, we did that at Complete Post Productions out there, on Burbank. We were paying 430 bucks an hour. And I basically told those guys, I engineered that whole thing by myself, while a lot of these guys played ping-pong. And I just told them, "It isn't that I don't think you have a really great facility here, it's just no place is worth 430 bucks an hour because you can't get that much done in one hour." And that's really a lot of what it was. The bills turned out to be enormous from that endeavor. But it wasn't as though Frank wasn't making money now. Like I said, the royalties that he got on an album were far above what anybody else got. And he cut some very good deals, and his manager did a good job on these tours. We played a lot of small places in America, but when we went overseas, they were all huge venues. Really very large venues.

Mix: One of the musicians on a Web site said that on one of the European tours they were basically going around the same circuit as the Rolling Stones and the Grateful Dead and outselling them.
Pinske: Absolutely. We would play an 18,000-seat place and it'd be sold out. When I first went over there, on the first European trip, I think it was before we got the truck, in the fall of 1980, I think we did one European leg, when I got over there, it was like opening up a door. It really was strange, for me, because we had come from America, where we had done these little Tower Theaters, these little 3,000-seat places. And then all of a sudden we're over there playing these huge venues. As a matter of fact, the first time I walked up the plane--this is no kidding, I think YAWYI had just come out then, I think--and I walked up the plane and somebody came up to me and asked me for my autograph, and I told the person, "No, I'm not in the band, I just travel with the band." And the guy said, "Well, you're Mark Pinske, right?" And I said, "Well, yeah, I'm Mark Pinske." And he said, "Well, what kind of mic did you use on the third cut of YAWYI on Ray White's guitar?" Which happened to be "Doreen." And I thought, what the heck is this? These people had listened to the album, and they knew what they were talking about. It was kind of scary. I think that was the first time I ever signed an autograph on my life. I told him he could probably get a burger at McDonald's for it. I told him it really wasn't worth anything. But nonetheless, it was a shocker for me, because what had happened is, I realized I was in a different room all of a sudden. It's like opening up these doors and watching all these people freak out, and then when you get back to America, it was like closing the doors again. So Frank, worldwide, or in Europe in particular, was a whole other experience. The fans knew what they were talking about. They knew what they were listening to. In a lot of way it inspired me. I can't even tell you how much it inspired me, because if somebody knew the work you did, and then heard some of the stuff you did, and knew the difference, it gave you the feeling, you get this enormous feeling that it was all worth it. Every little thing you could do was worth it.

Mix: When you went to Europe, did you take your own P.A. equipment over, or did you rent it all there?
Pinske: No, no. We took our own P.A. with us. We bought lights. Frank usually didn't rent anything. We bought LSD lighting. Simon, over there in London, with LSD Lighting, we'd

buy a lighting system from him, use it for the tour, and then sell it back to him at the end of the tour. So we'd buy light sets, but we took our own P.A. system.

Mix: Which was the Meyer system?
Pinske: Yeah. We bought the very first Meyer system, and took it all around Europe, I think, gee whiz, on two or three tours around Europe.

Mix: How many cabinets? These are the MSL3s, right?
Pinske: MSL3s, and four subs a side. We'd usually fly about, depending on the size of the venue--the bigger venues we would use backup, so we'd travel like 18 MSL3s per side, normally, with about four of the dual 18 subs. Then we had a center cluster as well. And we had racks and racks and racks of A and B amplifiers. But what we would do in big venues--even in the States, when we'd do something like Madison Square Garden, we would hire somebody like Clair Bros. to give us a backup, where we'd put delay towers. And then we would sync up the delay towers along with it. Now, over there, I think the first year we did Santana did a couple shows with us, we did I think Turbosound we used as backup. And they would come in, we'd have our Meyer P.A., and then we would delay lock in some backup systems on the real, real big places.

Mix: Did you have any problems getting 18 cabinets a side to combine properly? Sounds like a lot.
Pinske: No. We usually had two or three tiers. Like I said, it would vary, depending on how much backup we would use, how many we would hang. We had a special hanging grid. It is a lot. But normally we would try to arc three layers of six, or something like that. Sometimes we would just hang maybe 12 of them, depending on how wide the venue was. Sometimes we'd play in a tent, or something, obviously we wouldn't fly then, we would just stack. So it would change from venue to venue sometimes. But normally we had an elaborate flying grid that was really nice. And the Meyer stuff dispersed really well. The general setup, I think, over average, would be two banks, on bank aiming out and another bank aimed somewhat down, in a full arc, which I think was six a bank, normally, arched six at a time. And then sometimes we would hang three more off to the side, aiming sideways, depending on how far the seats would wrap around the venue. We always tried to keep it so it would screw up the stage.

Mix: What console were you using in about '81, '82.
Pinske: On the front of house? We continued to use the Midas consoles. We had a good thing going with Midas. We used the Midas consoles in the house. We even had a custom Midas, and gee whiz, there was another one we had made up for the monitors now, I'm trying to remember. It had 18 outs on it. And I had one custom Midas that was in that dumb Polaroid that I sent you. You couldn't see it very well, I apologize for those pictures, they're just Polaroids, but they made us some real nice, custom stuff, that had LEDs right next to the faders, so you could see the signal path coming in. We used a lot of Midas consoles for the house.

Mix: How was the monitor setup? Was there conventional wedges and sidefills?
Pinske: Monitoring got to be somewhat elaborate. Pretty much conventional wedges and sidefills, but Frank, like I said, would use 2 MSL3s on each side for his sidefills. [Laughs.] Not many people were using Meyers just for sidefills. But normally, wedges, and then what we did with--we got smarter as we went along. We took a lot of the system that used to be what we called the original dinosaur system that Frank owned, which is the JBL stuff, like your typical two 15s and a cabinet with a horn and a bullet tweeter, and we would lay them underneath the stage. Like for the keyboard players, they might have two of those

cabinets, and they would actually have a metal grid that they stood on, and the cabinets would be underneath them, so it would fire straight up on them. And that way it wasn't always deafening everybody else that was walking around in front of them. Or the old try to [end of side.]

Mix: How did you cope with the vocal mics? Because if you had three or four of them on the front line, that must have been hard to keep the drums out of them.
Pinske: Especially with as loud as Frank liked his sidefills. It was not a picnic. The guys were real good, Ray and Ike and everybody was real good at staying on their mic. We gated them, of course, as much as we could. I used the Quad-Eight NS120 noise gates, which is film gate, by the way. And the reason I used those was because I could go down 110 dB dynamically, but they didn't work like a conventional gate, like a Valley gate, like a Keypex 2. What they did was they had an FET transistor that just turned on. So they turned on instantly at full volume. And this way they didn't ramp up. You didn't have the rise time of the ramp. You had variable capacitors, so you had kind of a curvature to the slope, so you would have a release time and a curvature, a little bit like what a Drawmer would do, but better than a Drawmer, because say you had a tom-tom, and you were gating it, there would be a contour by a selection of five different types of capacitors, and the contour would follow the decay of the sound of the drum, for instance. So you would have a release time, and even after the release time was up, the contour would follow the decay. Because of this, the leakage of something like cymbals would decay with the sound. So say you'd have a hit on the drum it goes "doooooom." Well, the gate would follow the "doom" perfectly, and the leakage would go down with it. And it would sound like there was basically no leakage there at all. And there were no gates, really, in the world that would do that. Most gates would just hold for a release, and then they would either be a steep slope that would cut off, you know like on a kick drum or something, or they would stay open too long and you would get a lot of leakage. So what I did is I bought five racks of these Quad-Eight gates, because you had the FET transistor, which gave you instant full on, and you had variable decay that was really--really catered to the instrument, or the voice, in the case of--especially, the voice could say something, it wouldn't miss the enunciation of the vowel sounds of any of the--on the microphone like you might on certain types of gates. So this was a lot of the trick to how we got such good, isolated live mics.

Mix: Were you using 57s on the front line, mainly?
Pinske: Frank would use a 57, but we ended up using some AKG mics as well, because we had an AKG endorsement. As a matter of fact, I don't know if you read about this or not, but we actually put an SM57 cartridge inside one of the AKG condenser mics. Because we tried all these condenser mics out on Frank, and then the batteries would start dead, and he didn't like the way they sounded. He said, "Man, can't I just use a 57? My voice sounds good on a 57." So we kind of stuck a 57 capsule inside of an AKG mic, so there was a couple of pictures that were in some of the magazines where he's holding the AKG mic, but he actually had a 57 element inside.

Mix: What about Ray and Ike, and whoever else was singing? They were on the AKGs?
Pinske: We using on AKGs. AKG had made a lot of really good microphones, and it wasn't hard for us to find a family of them that worked very well. With Ray and Ike, it was quite easy, because normally they didn't--they didn't usually take the mics off the stand. Like Frank was always walking around with his mic. Those guys, the mics would stay pretty stationary. We had them going on their own track of the multitrack, anyway. So when it came right down to it, later on, you could just mute the track.

Mix: There's a fairly significant different between the mix of the band on the guitar album, say, and the live albums where there's people singing all the time, not surprisingly. There's much more isolation.
Pinske: Yeah. That whole guitar album that they put together, that I did all the live recordings on, that guitar release was put together after I left. That was kind of a diff--it's kind of strange for me to listen to some of these things that were put together after I left, off of recordings that I made.

Mix: Because they're mixed very differently from how you heard them at time?
Pinske: Yeah, mixed differently, plus you don't know how much anything might have deteriorated. We still had a lot of live analog tapes. We didn't get the digital machine into the truck, I think, until the '84 tour. And the '84 tour, by the way, that's one of the reasons why the recordings from that album were significantly better than anything else we did, ever, ever in history. So if you go to--you know that one link I gave you that says, "Venues?" If you check the '84 tour on that, you'll find some interesting stuff. There's actually a link in there, too, that talks about that song I told you about that was written about me called, "Carrie, You Fool." A notation on there about when Frank was telling the audience about--I think it was August in '84, when he was telling the audience about what the song was about. He was giving them the story. It was kind of funny. He explains that the song was about Mark Pinske in there. I found that kind of funny.

Mix: It's about a girl who wants to follow the band to the next gig, and Frank sings, "You'll find another engineer?"
Pinske: Yeah. "You'll find another engineer someday." Actually, the girl named Carrie Mellon in Pittsburg. Carol Mellon was her name, and Frank introduced me to her--actually, we were at this hotel in Pittsburgh, and Frank called me down to have a drink with him, and I went down there and he was talking to the manager. So we couldn't go up to Frank's suite because the manager working the hotel couldn't go there, so he asked the girl if there might be somebody that she knew that we could just go out and have a drink with her, have a date with, you know. So she called up Carrie and said, "Oh, yeah, Frank Zappa and me and his sound man are coming over to pick you up," and Carrie just said, "Oh, yeah, sure, right. Frank Zappa, right." So we pulled up in front of her house with a limo. [Laughing.] Which was pretty funny. And we just went out and did a few things, and then Frank kind of wrote a song about this girl. [Laughs.] And the events that happened that night. Later on, she bought me a cashmere sweater. And she wanted to steal some money from this Mexican guy. She got to be kind of a little problem, later. Nonetheless--I realized then for the first time in my life that a lot of Frank's songs were actually true stories about--

Mix: Seems that way. I was going to ask you about "Luigi and the Wise Guys," which sounds like a really quite vicious attack on somebody in the crew that nobody particularly liked.
Pinske: It was, actually. He had this little--well, Tony was his name. They liked him, but the wise guys was kind of--the guys that hung around got to be known and "the wise guys," Luigi and the wise guys at the table. And Frank was always--and the same thing, he did the same thing with "Marque-son's Chicken," because he used to fly a rubber chicken over the monitor mixer. So he wrote this song called "Marque-son's Chicken." You know, when you go through all this stuff and you realize that a lot of it--to me one of the most interesting things he wrote was when he did "The Mudd Club," or the Coneheads, from "Saturday Night Live." He would write these songs about these skits, and he would get into this unbelievable descriptions of the people that were there that night or something. We even went back and played the Mudd Club. [Laughs.] There was no way to record it, it was just a little three-foot stage.

Mix: I think he's actually got some sort of 2-track recording on one of the live tracks from one of the live albums from the Mud Club.
Pinske: I remember running something through a cassette, or something. But it was just a little mixer in a bar that you had no control of. Pretty much just a live mic hanging in the room. But it wasn't anything you could do to get quality. [Laughs.] But nonetheless it wasn't always about quality. It was about the incident, right?
Mix: Mike Kenneally relates an incident in which somebody managed to pour a glass of beer from a balcony onto the front-of-house console. This is in New York, on the '88 tour. Anything like happen to you?
Pinske: I think in that article he talks about somebody yelling, "Bring back Pinske."

Mix: It does. That's exactly what he says.
Pinske: I know which one you're talking. On the original Halloween tours, there was a group of people that hung around me. I had some really good live mixes going on, in those days, with those shows. I was really dedicated, and we really had it down to a science. So there were some people that really were spoiled as far as getting some really top-quality shows as far as our sound quality was at these shows. Frank was real picky about them. That was one of the benefits of working with him so long. When you know the song so well, for instance, there was one show we did in New York, I think it was at Madison Square Garden, where we decided to not use the recording truck. Because they wanted to charge us--they wanted us to pay $5,000 per show--the union wanted us to pay $5,000 per show for the privilege of recording our own material. That was the term they used. And Frank was totally mad about it. He said, "Mark," he said, "you're going to mix the house tonight, because no way am I going to give these guys the money just because of the principle of it." He said we record every minute that he's onstage, every show that we did. We didn't necessarily need to have that show on tape, because we had plenty of other shows on tape, so he decided "you're going to mix the house" that night. And of course, for me, when I would have a chance to go back out and mix the house, it was really a gas, because I was in the truck all the time, after that. So I would get the chance to go out and mix on the Meyer system, which was like heaven on Earth for me, because originally when I started, we had this dinosaur system that really sucked. So when I had a chance to go out and do a mix on the Meyer system, I would just go out there and jazz it all up. I might do a little more pizzazz-y mix, with more effects and stuff, because I just knew where every little nuance of the songs were. And I must admit, probably the best--I had the best mixing chops in those days than I had in my whole career. So those shows were a treat, got to be kind of a treat with some of the audiences, and little local reviews would come out about them and stuff like that. So what had happened is, these people started this little thing about wanted Pinske to mix all the shows. And Frank was getting kind of tired of this whole routine, and I think Kenneally was just kind of referring back to the fact that some of those guys were still around. Get a gun and shoot 'em, or something. [Laughs.]

Mix: You didn't have any disasters like that? You never lost a mixing console in the middle of a show?
Pinske: No. We had one guy fall out of a balcony one time, but he was OK. And I also did have some disasters in the recording truck, power supply went out right before we were going to go on live on satellite one time. Or the power supply blow up on one of the multitrack machines. I had things like that happen in the recording truck, but live-wise, the biggest problem we usually had there was just--people keeping away from the console. People would set drinks on it and stuff like that. But I didn't have one actually pour into the console. That must have been Harry--was Harry doing that show?
Mix: I don't know. Was he a mixer who was doing--
Pinske: He was a friend of Marque Coy's. I think he brought him on board to do that '88

tour, because I wasn't available then. I was tied up then, at that time. I didn't go back because actually I was just--you get into moving on.

Mix: We were talking about that. After you went off with New Edition, you struck out on your own as a front-of-house guy? No, you went back to Florida and built a studio.
Pinske: Yeah. I built a studio, but I still did some front-of-house--I did all those front-of-house shows. I've always enjoyed front-of-house mixing. That's originally where I started in the first place. We had talked about that briefly the first time I talked to you. And I always enjoyed front-of-house because there's nothing like the excitement of the front of the house, especially when you think you can make a difference. So, I always felt I was a good front-of-house mixer, and it was a lot of fun for me to do, so every once in a while--it's like a musician trying to stop playing, I guess.

Mix: You play something, right?
Pinske: I played bass guitar, and a little drums. I played when I was going to college, I played in bands.

Mix: And out of that, you wound up as the guy doing the P.A. and the recording and the mixing?
Pinske: Right. Kind of the guy around town that did the recording and mixing. To put it quite bluntly, I just happened to be a lot better engineer than I ever was a musician. [Laughs.] I think somebody told me that at one time. "You really ought to just stick to--" you know how Frank put it me? I don't know if I told you this, but you know how if you're a musician, and you feel like you're getting too old to be a musician or you give it up and you feel like you're giving up some creative essence or something, you know, you've heard this a lot. And then Frank told me, he said, "Mark, look at it this way. There are far less creative engineers than there are creative musicians." So he kind of looked at me as a creative engineer, is the way he put it. I asked him if he was just trying to make me feel better. [Laughs.] But it was a kind of interesting way of putting it. He was really true. It's really true. And engineering in itself is kind of--you have a chance to be very creative, as well, if you really apply yourself. And that's what I was trying to do.

Mix: Can you read music?
Pinske: Yes. I can read. I'm not a fast reader.

Mix: But you can follow a score?
Pinske: Yeah. And I had to. You had to with Frank.

Mix: It's been reported fairly widely that "Ship Arriving Too Late to Save a Drowning Witch" was supposedly made up of 15 different performances.
Pinske: As a matter of fact, he did that a lot, on a lot of stuff. We would have the actual sheet music out, especially with Steve Vai and a lot of those guys, and Tommy Mars, and we would go by bars, and he would say, "At Bar 128, bring in some reverb effects," or something like that. So I had to pay attention. But I'm not a--he always said that there were two best readers that ever worked for him, was Vinnie Colaiuta and Tommy Mars. Tommy Mars was pretty much known as "Hawkeye," and Vinnie, he said, could read anything you put in front of him. He would just chicken scratch something on a piece of paper, and Vinnie could just play it immediately. When he tried musicians out--there's no way I could keep up with any of those kind of guys, but I knew where we were in the pieces, and I could tell what the melody lines were, and the bass lines. Enough to know what I needed to know. Especially when we started doing a lot of the orchestration stuff, because we would go back and cut certain sections.

Mix: I was going to ask you about the assembly of the LSO sessions from the multitracks. You came back to Los Angeles with your multitracks from the LSO, right? And you recorded 24-track digital, or was it 32-track?
Pinske: No, no. We did 24-track digital. There were two 24-track digital machines waiting for us over there. And there was two analog machines, as well. They were 3M 79 machines. And what I did, is, I had them, the guys--we rented the Island mobile truck, and I had the crew put together an extra snake so we could run both the machines, in a little room, simultaneously with the digital machines, because I had never used the digital machines before, and I wasn't totally trusting them. So the deal was, we recorded on both mediums simultaneously. In other words, we rolled both tapes all the time. And in a way I kind of liked doing the two, because I had an automatic backup, in case something went wrong. So when we got back to the States, machine number 3 that Sony made--those were machines 1 and 2, and machine number 3 we rented from Sony, I think for like a grand a day or something, so we could evaluate the tapes. And after about a month or two of working with machine, we bought one. We just bought one because we fell in love with it. And that's when--up until that point, we didn't have a lot of good experiences with a lot of the digital stuff. A lot of the first digital stuff was really bad.

Mix: You had been recording some digital stuff before that?
Pinske: Oh, sure. Mick Glossop, as a matter of fact--you talked about him before--he had done a live digital recording for us, off of one of those--I forget where it was--Hammersmith, or somewhere--you see notes to of Mick Glossop's live recordings? We did some digital recording and when he came back it was on a 1510 system, which later became 1520, and then 1530, Sony. The first ones had some really--they had American converters in there. But you listen to 10 or 15 minutes of them, and Frank made the comment, saying, "It's like 8k darts in your forehead." It just had this real brittle sound, that your ears felt very fatigued after a very short time of listening to it. So we were very let down by it, so to speak. It just didn't have the warmth that most of the analog recordings had. So we had a number of experiences along the way that didn't convince us that digital was the way to go.

Mix: But this new generation of Sony machines made it?
Pinske: Yeah. The new generation Dr. Doi, they spent $2.5 million developing their own converter. The way Dr. Doi put it me was it was 400 times the resolution in these converters that they had previously in any converters. And the Sony 3324 was the introduction of those converters. Later, they took those converters and put them into the 1630 systems, and the better mastering systems that Bernie Grundman and everybody else started using. But at that point, the 3324 was the first machine they were in. And I asked Dr. Doi, who invented pulse code modulation, by the way, I asked him, I said, "If I'm looking at a TV picture,"--I was looking at a screen--I said, "how much better is this picture?" In these converters than say the converters they had previously. And he looked at me and he pointed at the TV screen, and he said, "See blade of grass growing," he said. I said, "See blade of grass growing?" He said, "Yeah, see blade of grass growing." He was just trying to tell me that there would be so much better focus, and so much better definition, that you could actually see the blade of grass growing. And I thought to myself, "If you put it that way, it's got to be a lot better." And then I realized, honestly, I realized that for the first time in my life I was dealing with a converter that basically had no side effects. You could record up to +24 dB on those machines, you know. It wasn't like a 0 dB, like the Mitsubishis. It had all the headroom in the world. You could track your drums at +18 on an average. And then you could pad down your console, and it was just unbelievable. I actually even remember telling them that at point, they should call it something other than digital, because digital already had a bad name. [Laughs.] It really is

the most analog-sounding machine, digital machine, even to this day, I think. Of course a lot of people like Bob Clearmountain and everybody else are all using the 48-track now. And Barbra Streisand even. But originally, there wasn't very many people that were on board. But it really was a phenomenal breakthrough in the digital medium.

Mix: So when you came back with LSO tapes, first of all, you decided which ones you were going to mix, or did you just mix everything and see which ones were usable?
Pinske: Oh, no. We didn't mix anything. The first thing we needed to do was listen and edit. First we listened to the digital tapes, then we pulled out some of the analog tapes to compare them. It didn't take us very long, just a matter of hours, to where we just decided to put the analog tapes back in the vault because the tape hiss was driving us nuts. When you didn't have the tape hiss, there was no way that we wanted to hear some real light violin, or harp or something playing, and listen to the noise that we didn't need to listen to. And it accumulated over all 24 tracks. So then what we did, is I made a digital backup of all the tapes, like I talked to you about that I did later on as a regular, and then we took the digital backup and we razor-blade edited it. And Frank would go through the movements, and we might have 12 takes of one section, and he was looking for which piece they performed the best. And when they performed it the best, we would edit out that piece, and then tape it together to the one previous to it. And sometimes we'd go bar by bar, and sometimes we'd got movement by movement. There was a lot of edits. And we basically just assembled what Frank thought was the closest to the best performance of what he had in his head, as far as when he wrote it. But of course, you know as well as I do the nightmare there is, a true composer can almost not ever have it perfect. There's always somebody not playing. But what Frank got into is the character of the people, too. He let a viola player take a solo, for instance, and rather than play it like he wrote it, he told him to come up with his own solo, and he let him ad lib. And he loved it. That's the way Frank was. He would always use the talents of the musicians around him, and kind of somehow make them fit into the picture. That's where his true genius was, was being able to assemble things from not only the talents of the people, but the talents of the musicians and everything that was involved. He was able to assemble pieces out of the people that were all part of the puzzle. And I think that's what made some of his stuff so collectively unique.

Mix: I've got a release date here that says the first LSO album came out in June of '83. What was the reception like? Do you remember whether it got good reviews?
Pinske: It was a sad thing, because we couldn't sell it in the United States.

Mix: Why not?
Pinske: We had the contract with CBS Records. With CBS National Account--International Account--we had two different contracts with CBS, with CBS internationally and CBS domestically. And CBS International was suing CBS domestic, believe it or not. The two companies were suing each other. And they were the same company. And Frank's contract was one of them that was affected by it. So we couldn't release that album in the States when it came out. We only could release it overseas. Which dramatically affected the release of it. However, the reception of it was good. So, getting back to that, that's where Pierre Boulez heard the record, and liked it, and contacted Frank and asked him to do a piece for him or something. And that was I think one of Frank's happiest moments. We had Kent Nagano conducting that thing. The darn thing turned out pretty good. All in all. But as you know, Frank's classical taste was somewhat strange. [Laughs.] If you could have heard him explain what "Mo 'n' Herb's Vacation" was about, you would have died laughing. When he told the story--there's nobody like him telling the story. When he was trying to explain it to the orchestra that he was mad at both of them, so he did a gay scene

where they're walking down the beach with one of them had their hand on the other guy's rear and stuff, and he was really trying to rub it in, so they did this kind of island feel. But it was like him explaining a cartoon. And he was trying to make it really out there, right? And when he explained it, and then you listen to the way they played it, it all kind of made sense to you. But the average person listening to it wouldn't have any idea what the hell they're doing there, you know. He just got into characterizations like that. He would characterize something. He would always go for a little bit off the left wing. You know from just the way he is. But on the other hand, he was dead serious about it. There was a difference in his--there was a whole difference in his attitude about the classical stuff, so to speak, than there was about his normal stuff. And I found that was kind of a--it's like Chapter 300, or whatever. The whole time I was with him was just fascinating. It was absolutely fascinating.

Mix: You mentioned Pierre Boulez. A year later, in January '84, the Boulez pieces were recorded. Did you have anything to do with them?
Pinske: No. There was an engineer that worked with Boulez that he wanted to do those recordings. There was no reason to fight that. It was the kind of thing where Frank was just overwhelmed to be able to do some work with him. So it wasn't something that we were going to get involved with from the technical aspects like we would normally, and make a big deal about it. So they pretty much went with what they knew.

Mix: But the album that came out had four Synclavier pieces on it, which were presumably recorded at UMRK.
Pinske: Right. Most all of the Synclavier stuff I would have recorded. I'm not so sure that wasn't a mistake.

Mix: Mixing the Synclavier--
Pinske: Mixing--yeah. You know what I mean. If you look at a lot of those albums, Frank would do that. He would throw stuff in on an album that he didn't need to throw in on an album, and it would make the album a total different kludge of things.

Mix: I actually like the Boulez album a lot. But I see your point.
Pinske: The Synclavier stuff--like "Francesco Zappa," I must admit, was fun doing. Because it was interesting. First off, it was a minstrel that played kind of happy, what do you call it? In the medieval-century type, 100 years before Frank, happy minstrel music that was totally unlike Frank's music completely. But it was kind of unique, and it was kind of fun to do, when we programmed all that stuff in the Synclavier. And then when we played it, we all had fun doing it. Even Frank got a joy out of it. But I don't think a lot of people really understood why he did it. And in fact, David Ocker, I think, brought us a piece one day on that. He said, "I got this piece from a guy named Francesco Zappa." And we thought he was pulling our leg, you know? He got it from--I think it was, the what? The Mormon library or something. They were revering it in college, and then we noticed that it wasn't copyrighted. There was no--none of it was published. It was an unpublished piece. So Frank said, "Go fine out about this guy and see what else they had." Well, they found a whole bunch of stuff in the Mormon records, but there was a lot of pieces by this guy, and none of them were published. So Frank decided that he would publish them. So we had the publishing rights on them. Well, once we had the publishing rights on them, it only made sense to try to do something with it. And then it was kind of ironic that there was this musician that lived 100 years before Frank that had a traveling group in minstrels that traveled around Italy and Germany playing music. [Laughs.] It was just too ironic, or too much of a coincidence, so we decided that we would take these pieces and program them

into the Synclavier and try to do the instrumentation as true as we could to what we thought we saw there that was written.

Mix: In Frank's lifetime, a Synclavier was still viable, but it's a white elephant now, isn't it? In that NED has gone away.
Pinske: I don't know if it's a white elephant. I thing Dweezil still screws around with the one they had a little bit. But it probably is a white elephant now. It was archaic as far as how efficient sampling is now. But we really did take it to the extreme once we moved it up to the 100kHz sampling rate. We sampled every note of the Bosendorfer into the thing. And I think the low note was like 8 seconds long. Just so we could have the real piano sound on it. And we did some kind of elaborate things like that with it, that kind of made it more useful for us. Because you're right, the converters and everything else are far outdated now. It's just like talking about an old Fairlight or something.

Mix: I was just making the point that the parent company's disappeared, so there's no--
Pinske: New England Digital? Yeah, that's who it was. Yeah.

Mix: But he didn't take that on tour in the '84 tour, did he?
Pinske: No. As a matter of fact, he always thought that we could program everything into that and it would just make everything on tour a lot easier, but . . .

Mix: It didn't work out that way.
Pinske: Not really. I tried to do that with Jermaine Jackson. I went and did some sampling for Jermaine Jackson--I sampled all Jermaine Jackson's album after I left Frank, and we tried to put together all these Emulator 2s that were going to use live of all these parts of the album that somebody is supposed to be playing, but you just hold down one note. And we had this main data bank of stuff, and I did this elaborate sampling. It just--it didn't seem real. It seemed like a bunch of fake junk. Somebody just holding down a bunch of samples. So that was a short-lived thing, too, but nonetheless, the idea--the idea's been used. Let's face it. People have used samples to death since then. But Frank always wanted to stay ahead--he always had these ideas--when we originally had a semi-Broadway play put together for this "Thing-Fish," he wanted to have all the scenery done on a hologram, so the set changes would all be done with holograms. Of course, we couldn't do it. [Laughs.] In his mind, that's what he wanted.

Mix: It's interesting that he kept trying to do things that, I won't say failed, but had not really come to fruition in the past. Like he wrote several musicals "Hunchentoot" and "Thing-Fish." And he also made several films, or started. And for every one of them he must have started at least two others.
Pinske: You're right.

Mix: He didn't give up, did he?
Pinske: No, and I'm telling you, it was amazing when you were a part of that at all, if he would sit down and write some lyrics, and then 10 minutes, he would write a whole--he could write almost a whole song. It would just flow out of him. And that was one of the most genius amazing parts about it. When it came to being creative, he was never short of ideas. He always just had so many ideas. And he really was pretty much a pioneer from every way. Every aspect of it, from the way we recorded to the way he wrote songs, to the way he wanted to display something. Or the way he might want to do something, like you said, whether it's doing a musical. He always wanted to try to do something new and different and innovative. That was really the part that didn't sink in 'til a number of years later. I knew I was in the middle of all this, but I didn't know that I would look back later in

my life and go, "Man. You're a really lucky person to have even been a part of this." There's very few situations in the world where you could be around somebody that has pretty much all the money he needs, and he spends all his money experimenting. And doing new things every day. And just trying things. Isn't that kind of like the ultimate? Especially for like an engineer, or a musician, to where you can just kind of experiment and write and do things, just try new things all the time. Like an artists being able to paint what he wants to paint, and write a book that he wants to write. It's kind of the ultimate from the engineering aspect. The down side of it is, of course, we had 10 racks of effects on both sides of the control room, so you had all the equipment there was in the world, you had every microphone that's ever made, the whole collection of mics from RCA DX-77s on up, so the down side of it was, if you didn't get the right sound, you'd be gone. [Laughs.] It was a little bit of pressure there. I felt like I was dancing on ice the first three years. I always felt like, gee, I got to earn my rank. You were never really totally comfortable with the fact that you could always be replaced. But somehow, I felt there was a little angel on my shoulders in some ways, because of little things that happened. Like that little incident I told you about when I was auditioning. With the noise in the mic preamp. It's ridiculous. I had some lucky breaks. Like somebody was watching over me. I made some good decisions, and fortunately, Frank tolerated me enough as a person to where we got to be good friends, and was able to last in there long enough to feel that I made a significant difference to what it was he was doing. You can't replace that. It's not like those things are available every day of your life. And I realize now how unique and how special that was. And basically, how unique and how special he was. Because it took him to make it happen. If you get in an environment like that, and you have a guy that can totally control the environment, to where you're not interrupted, you could finish your train of thought, right in the middle of creating a whole masterpiece, and nobody's going to interrupt you. The phone isn't going to ring. Nobody can get to you. You have your environment controlled. I always envied Frank for that. He was able to control the environment so that we were able to finish what it was we were doing. And there's very few artists that can do that. Right there tells you the reason why he built that studio. So he would have that controlled environment, to where he could go in there, and for the first time in his life, finish his train of thought. Go in and just not come out 'til he's damn well done with it. And once you've worked with him like that on a daily basis, you realize, gee, isn't this really a necessity for anybody that's creative? Doesn't anybody really need to have the chance to be able to be uninterrupted, and be able to be funded? And all of that. I'm afraid that the average artist doesn't really have the pleasure of that. Like you were talking about how he went and recorded at different studios. This is the exact reason why you don't. Because you run out of money, you're on a schedule. You gotta be in at 10 o'clock in the morning even though you may be sick that day. There's all these things that can make for a bad project. And all those things kind of go away when you have total--when you have the luxury, I guess, is what it is.

Mix: You recorded vocals for Johnny Guitar Watson, right?
Pinske: He did the "In France" song. And he came up a couple of times. Him and his gold teeth. He had gold plating on the dashboard of this '55 Chevy. [Laughs.] But Johnny Guitar Watson, Frank introduced me to him originally, said--he would bring this kind of people up, and he just totally admired these people, because he developed--according to Frank he developed a certain style of guitar playing, that Johnny did. And I don't know if you've ever hear any recordings or anything about when he came in and sat in live when we played down in Hollywood, at one of the theaters down there. Trying to remember the name of that theater. Johnny Guitar Watson came in, and George Duke came in. Everybody kind of came in and did a little--sat in and played some songs with the band. And Johnny just leaned over the top of the front of the stage and did this guitar, and basically stole the

show. But he came up to the studio, and we recorded him. And he did these really ridiculously strange vocals on "In France" and a couple of other things.

Mix: He did "I Don't Even Care," on "Frank Zappa Meets the Mothers of Prevention."
Pinske: Yeah. We put him down on a couple of things. Frank had the habit of that, too. When we had somebody like that there, we would record him on one or two or maybe three pieces. This is a lot of what happened with some of the stuff like "Sleep Dirt" and "Hunchentoot" and things like that, too. We would take these artists and put them on a number of tapes, and maybe only one of the songs we recorded him on would get on an album. And then later on, Frank would peel this other tape off and use it somewhere else. And that's kind of what happened with Johnny. Johnny actually came up for a number of sessions, and the also Frank had a big listening party when we did "Thing-Fish." He invited up everybody that was on it to come and listen to the album. And we played back out into the studio, and had a little get together. Which was kind of unique, because we had everybody from Terry and Dale Bozzio, to--that album was loaded with all kinds of star collections. Unfortunately, I really wish we still had an original version of that, because it was cleaner, it had less swear words in it, and just moved along a lot nicer. There's always those kinds of things, right? I do have a whole set of lacquers, different lacquers of original mixes we did, by the way. I got some original mixes we did of the London Symphony Orchestra, even that were never released. We must have mixed that album two or three times. I have one version of I mixed the whole thing on. And there are unique mixes like that. I always felt somehow would always get out that never did. It's almost too late, now. I appreciate your taking the time and doing this interview with me, and being so patient with my rambling.

Mix: It's a thrill for me, honestly.
Pinske: Some of the best people I had, I think I gave you a link to Bob Harris, or if you type "Mark Pinske" in at Alta Vista in quotations you'll get some interesting articles. Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't. Some of them fall off. If I put my name in at Yahoo, or at Hotbox, I get totally different links than I do if I put it in--all the search links are different. It's kind of nuts. You'll get different links, and you'll find somebody talking in articles about some of the stuff that we had done. But a lot of my good friends that I've know like that, the musicians over the years, Tommy Mars, some of those guys, they keep telling me I really need to write a book. I almost don't know where to start or where to finish.

Mix: I've been reading some of the books. There's definitely a need for a good one.
Pinske: That's the thing. The reason why I never did is because I thought, "You don't need anymore half-assed books about Zappa." You would need to nail it down to the incidents that were really unique, that made a difference. I think the behind-the-scene things that happened when certain artists came in and recorded, maybe some of the methods we used, things that were talked about, and some of the real creative genius that Frank did. There was always things that we were experimenting on a daily basis, and when you ask me, for instance, about like say "Ya Hozna," my mind goes back and starts thinking about the session, and I would have never thought of that.

Mix: While you're thinking about it, a large part of the vocal is from some version of "Sofa--
"
Pinske: "Sofa," uh-huh. 16-track. Right--

Mix: with George Duke singing. Did you take that 16-track and copy certain tracks off it, and then have the drums dubbed forward, or did you just fly it into some pre-existing

rhythm track?
Pinske: No, no, no. We took the 16-track recording--actually, I think we bounced the whole thing over on a 24-track, and then turned it over. So we wouldn't ruin the original master. And like I said, we did that a lot. When we experimented, we would just take a backup tape. And we turned it over, and then we actually flew other vocals in. I thought about that later, after I talked to you about it. We did take some other vocals from some other songs, and put them backwards. And flew some of them in on some other tracks. And then did all kinds of different instrumentation around it.

Mix: The reason I ask is because "Sofa" is a waltz time, so that's 3/4, but the forward track that was dubbed on, is it 5/4?
Pinske: There was a totally ridiculous thing. That's why a lot of the stuff--we probably worked with two or three different multitracks at different times, and 2-tracks. And we may just take backward vocals off something, and lay it in. [Sings.] "Yaaaaa Hoooooznaaa," the stuff that came in backwards. And it had nothing to do with the rhythm so much as the way it sounded. And then we would fly stuff in.

Mix: I got the impression that the tempo for the forward track was derived from the backward track.
Pinske: No, no. Not the tempo of the track. Every other vocal, or every other chorus, or every other--the sections of the vocals that we used, were laid out. And when we tracked something forward over to it, we kind of stumbled across something, much like the way we did on "Tink Walks Amok."

Mix: That has triple-tracked basses on it.
Pinske: That was a Hofner bass by the way. It was pretty interesting how we--unique sound on that thing, too. I think it was--we did this kind of stuff all the time. And the rhythm would come out as almost some kind of a mistake. And this is where Chad Wackerman came in. Chad told us, this is a statement that Chad made to me one time, he said, "You know if you make the same mistake twice, you have a groove." [Laughs.] You don't think about it. He's right. So some of this stuff would just kind of happen, and Frank would build off of a mistake that happened. And then we would try to make it make sense. You kind of derived a rhythm based off a lot of the things that you pieced together. And the things that were pieced together, which wasn't necessarily just that vocal, but it was other vocals as well. Like we might have used the first chorus of "Ya Hozna," of "Mein Sofa," and then nothing in between. And then another chorus later. Then we'd put a forward beat on there, and then drop some other vocals in there, and something forward, some things backwards, and it was kind of like we're just sitting there putting together a collage.

Mix: I was just trying to figure out whether the tempo for "Ya Hozna," which is not in 4/4, it's in 7/8 or 5/4 or something.
Pinske: I could tell you--I tell you, if I sat down and listened to it, it was the second piece we did, "Won Ton On" was actually the first experiment, and it all derived from this "No Not Now" thing. And then we kind of got carried away with it for a while, we spent a couple of days doing it, then we got away from it, then we came back to it again. And then, when we got into doing "Ya Hozna," it was a whole different thing than "Won Ton On," but if I sat down and listened to it, because we were doing two--I started wondering if we were going to live the rest of our life doing backwards pieces there for a while, because for a couple of weeks you're working in this backwards mode, you're mind kind of gets weirded out, and I got a little bit confused on "Won Ton On," and "Ya Hozna." As a matter of fact, I probably have rough mixes of it that have different pieces that got erased and got taken out. Because we would try something, and maybe not like it, and remove it and put something

else in there. But if I sat down and listened to--is that on one of the YCDTOSA albums, which one is "Ya Hozna" on?
Mix: It's on "Them Or Us." It's the third track on "Them Or Us." It's right after "In France." It goes "Closer You Are," "In France," "Ya Hozna," "Sharleena," "Sinister Footwear 2," "Truck Driver Divorce," "Stevie's Spanking," "Baby Take Your Teeth Out," "Marque-son's Chicken."
Pinske: Those were, originally, now that you mention it, it was George Duke and Napoleon Murphy Brock that did the original "Sofa" piece on there. But there was something else off of those same recordings. I think they were from the Baltimore tape [end of side]

. . .since then, she just kind of started treating me different, and then things king of got sour. What was originally quite friendly turned into just an uncomfortable situation. But there was no major, huge fallout, so to speak. Except that she didn't like that. She pretty much didn't like a lot of people around Frank, and always thought that everybody was trying to rip Frank off. She had a pretty deep paranoia over a lot to things. That's why Marque's so paranoid. If you talk to Marque Coy. He can't do anything with her approval. Well, I don't need her approval. I have my own life. That's one of the reasons why I left, to tell you the truth. It was just uncomfortable. And not creative at all. Honestly. I got along with her, and I love Dweezil and Ahmet and Moon, and all of them. But I think since I left, she soured the grapes, quite a bit. She put the--she kind of stained . . . what she believed I was doing and what I wasn't doing. But when it comes right down to it, there was Frank and me in the control room. For 13 hours a day. And Bob would come in and then there was Bob and Frank. None of those people were there. They weren't there. So how can they know anything about what went on? They don't. They don't know anything. How can you explain that? You can't explain that. Or what would that have to do with any of them? It has nothing to do with any of them. They weren't a part of the creative process. All she did is try to control the marketing, try to control the sales, try to get in and take over everything, and try to be--I've heard all kinds of things about her screwing up a lot of Dweezil's stuff that Dweezil was trying to do. But Marque still works for her. And Marque and I go way back. I'm sure he told you that part.

Mix: No, he didn't. Well, he gave me the name of your band. What was is, Helix. He did say you went way back. Did he come into the picture through you, or the other way around?
Pinske: Marque-son? No, I hired him for Frank. He was a roadie in the band I played in, in Colorado. Then when I got the job for Frank, I brought him in from Colorado, and I brought Tom Ehle in, and I brought George Douglas in. They were all people that I knew from before. And I got them guys all a job. Now, George only lasted a year and left. Tom Ehle stayed with us for a long time, and Marque-son's still there, Marque Coy is still there. I brought him in to mix monitors, originally, because we needed a monitor mixer. And I thought he could handle it because he had done some road work in the past. He's quite a good engineer, Marque is. He got to be pretty good. He went out and did Cheap Trick, and some other people there for a while, but he's just kind of stayed close to the womb. He kind of had his own little world out there at Joe's Garage.

Mix: That's why I called him, and he said, "Yep. This is what I do."
Pinske: But if you want him to say anything about Frank, Gail's got him so scared, he won't--he's not going to give you a whole lot of useful stuff because he's going to have to bring her in, and if he brings her in, she'll want to control the whole article. Like she does with everything else she does. I don't know why she does that. It's stupid. It's kind of a sad thing, because in my opinion, the more publicity she--anything good that could be said at

all about Frank, the more would help the archives and everything else. I don't know why she got that way, at all. I really don't. I honestly don't understand, even why she got so upset over that one little incident that we had, because there really wasn't much more to it than that. I wasn't directly involved with her on a daily basis. She was up in the house, and I was in studio. I'd lock up the studio and go home, and I'd come back and Frank and I would record. Outside of the fact that, let's face it, the studio took Frank pretty much away from the family, and so did all the touring. Which I imagine all the family members have probably have some regret for that, a little bit. Because he was doing what he wanted to do all the time. But if you built a $3.5 million studio, you'd probably use it, too. And I was just one of the engineers he had to have in order to keep it cranking all day long. And on the road, of course, she wasn't with us, ever. She never went on the road with us. So I don't know why she still wants to go back--like Jimmy Carl Black, I talked to him, and I talked to Denny Walley, the guys that did The Grandmothers? They were going to go out doing some tours, and they said that Gail had pretty much stopped them from performing and using that name, The Grandmothers. I don't know how she could even stop them from using that name, 'cause it's not the same name as the Mothers of Invention. Or why would you bother? Because anything that would help keep the legend alive, in my opinion, would be a good thing, wouldn't you think?
Mix: I think so. There's actually a band coming to San Francisco next month called "Project Object," which has, I think Ike Willis is in it, and Don Preston and some other--not that they're in it full time, but I think they're appearing with this Project Object. As you know, there's a bunch of bands out there that do Zappa material.
Pinske: Sure. I talked to Ike a couple times since then. None of us were able to find Ray White. I have a little folder I keep called the "Ex-Zappa People," and I talked to Craig, I got the note from Craig "Twister" Steward out of the blue, too. But everybody's all doing different things, now.

Mix: Yeah. It's almost ten years.
Pinske: Yeah. It's a long time done.

Mix: You said earlier that by the time you left, Frank was getting ill. But I thought his cancer wasn't diagnosed until 1990.
Pinske: No, but he did go through a case of shingles before that. I don't know if you knew about that.

Mix: I didn't, no.
Pinske: He had a case of shingles, and he got kind of ill and slowed down a little bit there. But he was going still full strong when I went and did Men at Work.

Mix: I know he smoked all his adult life. Did that show up in the equipment, or did you just have powerful fil--
Pinske: That was kind of a pain. We had a special filter system in the control room. At the back of the control room, there was three filter systems in the air conditioning that we pretty much left running all the time. And he sat back--he had a grey chair in the back, and he smoked continuously. Two-and-a-half, three packs a day. Pretty much all the time, cigarettes and coffee. He's pretty much anti drugs, but--

Mix: Made an exception for nicotine.
Pinske: [Laughs.] For nicotine and caffeine. Caffeine kept us going.

Mix: And I guess back then in the early '80s it wasn't a problem traveling on commercial flights, because you could still smoke on that. That became an issue later on.
Pinske: Yeah, I guess it did. We did most of our traveling in the States on commercial, and then we'd do Lear jets overseas, or private jets sometimes overseas. On one of our tours we did that. I'm curious, though, if you got a hold of Marque. Was he just not

receptive?
Mix: No, he was cheerful, but he said he'd have to talk to Gail. So I sent him an email saying, "Here's what I want to talk about." But he hasn't got back to me.
Pinske: Maybe I shouldn't have given you that number. That might be a bad thing.

Mix: I'm sure Joe's Garage is in the book.
Pinske: I don't mean that. I just mean, I should probably call Marque and talk to him about it. And see if I could loosen that up a little bit. I know that it's strange that--because he stayed on board. See, I was there, and then they brought him in. I was probably with Frank a year and a half before we brought Marque aboard. But he's now set the record, I think, for the longest employee, I think, of the whole family.

Mix: Did you ever have a situation where somebody from the crew was sent home because they weren't cutting it on tour, because their personal habits weren't in line with the corporate policy?
Pinske: Well, yeah. Ike Willis was sent home. Yeah.

Mix: Right at the beginning of a tour, right?
Pinske: That was when we were in Berkeley, I think. He wasn't even allowed to perform that night, as a matter of fact. Frank was real upset about that. He didn't like anybody doing anything, and if he caught 'em, they were gone. Pretty much immediately. But then, obviously, he was able to bury the hatchet with Ike, because he worked with Ike later. Ike went back out on an '88 tour, didn't he?

Mix: Yeah, I think he did.
Pinske: There was a time when he was never going to let Ike Willis in, or Roy Estrada. There was all those kind of times, but then again, when they got back together, they were glad as hell to see each other. So that's just nothing more than old guys working together, I guess. Pretty much what that's all about. But I saw--there wasn't too much happening as far as the crew's concerned. If somebody in the crew got fired, they're just pretty much, "window or aisle." He would just make the jokes on stage. And that would happen that way. Fortunately, I was able to take another gig, myself. But most of the people, some of the people didn't have any choice in the matter. And there was kind of a sad situation, with Thomas Nordegg, for instance. He was probably the most loyal person to Frank of all time, and Gail made Frank fire him. That was probably the saddest day of Frank's life.

Mix: For what infraction?
Pinske: She couldn't find some receipts on some grocery bills, and she was sure that he had ripped him off or something. And I remember him being very upset about it. I remember him asking, "Are you happy now?" or something. It really upset Frank. He was probably the most trustworthy person you'd ever known in your life. Anybody who knew him, if you knew him like I knew him, or anybody else, he would never do anything like that. 'Course, three months later, they found all the receipts anyway. But there was never an apology or anything.

Mix: What was his position?
Pinske: He buried Frank's parrot. He was the liaison. He did everything for Frank. For eight or ten years, he was the one who unpacked his clothes, and took care of the family, and went out and got pizzas, and kept us all going. One of the most trustworthy people you'd ever know.

A Look At The Salt Lake Favorite

By Steve Chapman
The Event, December, 1981

Frank Zappa
December 7, at the Terrace
In 1965 Frank Zappa was the leader of an obscure LA rhythm and blues band known primarily for insulting audiences in Pomona. Since then little has changed. Sure, Frank is less obscure now, but even by today's standards, considering the antics of his musical progeny the latter-day LA punks, who regularly spit on their fans, he could still be considered insulting. How else would you describe someone who composes concertos for violins and farts, or who collects and hangs on stage enough women's underwear during his live performances to make said stage look like a Brooklyn tenement on a humid washday? If not insulting, at least mildly offensive. Well, okay, how about slightly irreverent?

To be fair, although the same could hardly be said for many punk bands, insulting people is merely one aspect of what Frank Zappa and his music are all about. He has been called worse things than offensive. And better. In fact, in the fifteen years since the release of the first Mother's of Invention album, "Freak Out", virtually no adjective has been left unturned by writers and critics attempting to discover and come to terms with Zappa's role in contemporary culture. He has been called everything from anarchist to art rocker, from guru to genius, from idol and ironist to just plain ugly and weird.

Zappa's music, like himself, is not easily described. A reporter from Time magazine some years ago, after attending a concert by the Mothers, once compared one of Zappa's songs to a "noise like a zoo burning down." Zappa, a self-taught composer, has cited Stravinsky and Edgar Varèse as his idols, but influences in his music can also probably be traced to people like Lenny Bruce and Spike Jones as well as the doowop groups and avant garde jazz improvisationists of the fifties. On well over twenty-five record albums Zappa has parodied virtually every known style of music from classical to country. He is considered by many to be a genius in the recording studio. His records are often aural collages that rely on electronic gimmicks and tape constructions for their eclectic texture.

Although he didn't begin writing rock songs until his twenties, Zappa played in several bands in high school as a drummer before switching to guitar. He was kicked out of his first band because, as he says, "I couldn't keep a good beat and because I played the cymbals too much."

Despite these inauspicious beginnings, by the latter half of the sixties Zappa was somewhat of a fixture on the LA underground music scene and president of the first rock conglomerate. Bizarre Inc. was an umbrella organization which oversaw, in addition to two record labels, a management firm, a PR and advertising agency, a film production company, a music publishing company and a book division. Like his music, some of Zappa's business dealings were anything but standard. He once signed to one of his record labels a man named Wild Man Fisher, an ex-mental patient who made his living blithely shrieking distraught original compositions at passers-by on the sidewalks of Sunset Blvd. for a nickel a song.

Today Zappa is as busy as ever, touring and making records. In the last two years he has released a three act rock opera, three albums of guitar solos available by mail order only, and most recently a new double record studio album entitled "You Are What You Is" which, according to a recent press release "sets new standards of excellence in recording, mixing and mastering from a musician already noted for the high quality of his product"

Actually, to the untrained ear of this writer there seems scant if any appreciable difference between what Zappa is doing on his new album and one he released ten years ago called "Fillmore East June 1971" The music is still manic, the lyrics funny and ribald. And Zappa is still poking fun at many of the same things; teenagers, dopers, the army, rock and roll, and orally fixated young women.

Some things never change.

An Interview with Frank Zappa
The Event: I think for many people in this country Utah has a kind of laughable image as the last bastion of conservatism and repressiveness, yet I know the last time you played here you sold out two shows. Given the iconoclastic nature of your music and performances does that kind of support in a place like Utah surprise you and do you share that perception of Utah yourself?

Zappa: No I don't share that perception of Utah because I've been places that are more conservative than Utah. There's nothing wrong with conservatism if that's what you want. But as far as the response of the audiences in Utah, I'd like to say that last year that show we did there was probably one of the best shows on the tour.

The Event: Are you speaking of the early show, the late show, or both of them?

Zappa: Both of them. The whole evening was real hot, except for that jerk in front with the bottle. I enjoy playing in Utah. We've been there many times. And I don't think there's any reason why the audience in that particular area ought to be self-conscious about itself or feet that it's in competition with any other place in the world for my affection, because they've al ready got it.

The Event: I know you've worked with several symphonies in the past. Have you ever thought about or wanted to work with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir?

Zappa: I would have no objections with working with them. I'm sure I could write something for them that would be quite memorable. But I'm not sure they would want to work with me. Actually the Utah Symphony is a pretty good orchestra too. I have a recording of Maurice Abravanel conducting that symphony on a piece by Varèse, that I though was a really good performance.

The Event: Speaking of Edgar Varèse, I know that you consider him to be one of your idols and I'm wondering considering the fact that you've been in the music business now for over twenty years, how closely do you now identify with composers like Varèse who we're basically misunderstood under appreciated during their lifetimes?

Zappa: Well I still like the music. He may be dead, but the records live on

The Event: But do you consider yourself still, at this stage in your career; misunderstood or underappreciated by the public at large. I know you have a low regard for the collective intelligence of the average American.

Zappa: No I don't have a low regard for their collective intelligence. What I've said oftentimes, and been misquoted is that there's no way that Americans can actually be as stupid as they pretend to be. It's against the law of averages, that that many people could be that dumb all at the same time. The reason for it is they pretend to be dumb, so they can have friends. And their friends are all doing the same thing and so everybody pretends to be a good ol' dumb guy and a nice ol' dumb girl. And the reason they do it is because there's a myth, that's been perpetuated in the United States, that smart people don't get laid. Everybody wants to have some kind of gratification so what do they do they all pretend to be dumb and they figure the dumber they are the more friends they're going to have. That's what I'm against. Without active intelligence, progress is not going to be possible.

The Event: Many people in Salt Lake City might be interested to know that in the past you have worked with musicians from Utah, namely the Fowler Bros., Bruce and Tom. Could you talk a little about how they first came to your attention and what it was like working with them?

Zappa: I never got a chance to play with all of them. The most I ever had in a band was three, but that's a pretty good average. That's definitely a unique family. The father is very interesting also. In fact at one time he invited my whole band up to the small jazz school there in Utah where he teaches, the name of which I can't think of right now, and he had us spend the day and everybody lectured on his particular instrument or skill. But the brothers are great, they're amazing musicians. I think they have their own band now.

The Event: I came across an article printed ten years ago in Seventeen Magazine in which you were quoted as saying that you had stopped listening to rock music the minute they started putting strings on Ray Charles and Fats Domino records...

Zappa: That was rhythm and blues not rock and roll. That's a true quote though.

The Event: Well let me ask you, do you still find contemporary rock or rhythm and blues unappealing?

Zappa: Well what I was saying in that earlier article was that certain things that appreciated in early rhythm and blues, which was the straight ahead animal naturalness of it, was being produced to death. I never felt that Fats Domino needed a string section and neither did Ray Charles. When it started happening the next thing you knew a lot of other artists started getting that shiny, sleazy, twinkly background and it wasn't necessary. It took a lot of the balls out of the music.

The Event: You didn't feel that it was true to the real spirit of the music itself.

Zappa: I didn't think that it was aesthetically correct. It just wasn't my taste. But I already had a large collection of rhythm and blues records from '55 to '58 and still listen to them. In fact, I was listening to some yesterday. I have some cassettes with me I hear on the road.

The Event: How about contemporary rock and roll?

Zappa: It's in sad shape, because basically all it is is product.

The Event: So you feel that way even about the so called new wave, post-punk avant garde.

Zappa: Yeah, I mean that's the essential product and the more they protest and say that what they're doing is different the more it sounds like 1960's chord progressions with a synthesizer playing it instead of a twelve string guitar.

The Event: As a musician, aside from individual creative freedom, what else do you hold sacred?

Zappa: Well sacred sounds like something connected with religious beliefs and I never discuss my religion.

The Event: Perhaps I can rephrase the question. It seems there's hardly anything that you are afraid of taking shots at.

Zappa: I'm not scared of anybody but you have to remember that another cornerstone of my philosophy is that Science believes that hydrogen is one of the building blocks of the universe. I disagree. I say that the most plentiful substance in the universe is stupidity. There's more stupidity per square foot in this universe than anything else. People can go on talking about hydrogen as much as they want to, but stupidity is where it's at. And to ignore it would be shameful. Because if there's so much...

The Event: Whose fault do you think that is?

Zappa: To ignore it, or to have stupidity?

The Event: That there is more stupidity than anything else.

Zappa: Well stupidity kind of ... it multiplies very quickly.

The Event: Do you think perhaps the media is responsible for propagating a lot of that?

Zappa: The media is responsible for maintaining ignorant standards and aesthetic stultification. But real stupidity is kind of homespun.

The Event: In another taped interview of yours which I listened to you mentioned a new movie you have made called "Baby Snakes" and a possible June release. Is that June '82?

Zappa: Well, we were trying to put the thing into release and we couldn't do it because major distributors wouldn't touch it. So if Donny and Marie can help me out...

The Event: So there's not a good chance that we'll be seeing that film in Utah in the near future?

Zappa: No, but one day.

The Event: Satire and parody are essential elements in your music and performances and I was just wondering how would you parody somebody like Frank Zappa if you had to? Or do you think it's possible?

Zappa: With space all things are possible. I could probably do it but see, in order for a parody to be effective the audience has to know enough about the original in order to appreciate the permutations. And that's the most difficult thing about doing a parody of Frank Zappa, nobody knows anything about me at all.

Interview with the Composer

By Michael Bloom
Trouser Press, February, 1980

Frank Zappa, approaching 40 years of age and 30 albums, is one of rock's most valuable institutions, a treasure trove of musical lore and sociological oddities. He's also one of the most terrifying figures in the industry. He's the ultimate mad scientist, the skeleton at the cultural feast, the vulture poised to pounce on the slightest pretension. He wields sarcasm like a straight razor in a gang fight, and his rhetorical weaponry is almost as sharp.

Moreover, he's never made any secret of his distaste for the critical profession. Joe's Garage Acts II and III includes the following categorical denunciation: "All them rock'n'roll writers is the worst kind of sleaze/Selling punk like some new kind of English disease/Is that the wave of the future? Aw, spare me please!" He's sure got Trouser Press's number, as well as several other factions. Even when he's trying to make himself more accessible to the press-this Joe's Garage is his third release for his Zappa label and he wants to give it every chance of succeeding-he promises to be a formidable interview.

But I suspected that if I ignored the adversary relationship and treated him like a human being, Zappa might respond as one. And it worked! Zappa metamorphosed into a bona fide nice guy. He talked at length about issues he feels are important, from spicy food ('When it starts sweating right through under your eyes then you know they did it right") to contemporary serious music ("I think 'November Steps' kicks the shit out of 'Turangalila'"). And I think he had a good time. I certainly did.

Of course, Zappa has a reputation for parboiling journalists. But then they have a propensity for pigeonholing: either making him out to be a spokesman for some vaguely defined weirdo caste, or (worse) digging for hippie dirt in the name of good copy. Consequently, Zappa keeps his guard up, and his guard varies from jargon to abrasion.

When I arrived, for example, a pair of reporters (from pop magazines in Italy and Japan, no less) were trying to guess Zappa's sexual preferences from his song lyrics. Apparently it's too naive to assume he has a happy, normal marriage, even if he and wife Gail have four children, from age 12 down to newborn. But here's this geezer Carlo asking, "What do you think is a sexy woman? Since your songs are filled with-"

"References to women?" interrupts an already testy Zappa. "Or women-type objects? The songs that I write have to do with the behavior patterns of different types of people, male and female specimens, OK? A lot of the examples I choose are unusual types of behavior, the pictures of the various specimens are not too cute. Everybody else writes songs about beautiful girls who make you fall in love, and groovy guys that are so wonderful, and heartbreak and all that shit-that's everybody else's department. I'm alternative information on specimen behavior." Not simply put, but an elegant, withering put-down. Carlo dropped the subject and will probably tell all his colleagues for the rest of his life what a bastard Zappa is to interview.

Zappa deals more kindly but just as firmly with the other popular misconception: that he speaks for a subculture. Carlo asked if he'd ever felt an affinity with popular culture. Zappa

quickly quashed the idea: "Meaning will I endorse the behavior of hippies and so forth? No. I don't think there is any one mass behavior spectrum I could put my stamp of approval on." So much for a so-called founding father of psychedelia. But the typewriter cadre won't take no for an answer, so they come back with a query about punk-much of which, to be sure, claims his aesthetic influence. Growing pedantic, he amplified:

"There's always unknown bands, there's always garage bands, and there's always upsurges. Some of it is wonderful and some of it is not. It's only because everybody is looking at it. Somebody writes in the newspaper, 'Punk is really happening,' bingo bango bongo, a thousand punk groups. The same guy who was singing like the Eagles the other day has just slashed his face with razor blades, stuck pins all over his nose, dyed his hair blue, got a mohawk haircut, ripped all his clothes, forgotten everything he ever learned on his instrument, bangs the fuck out of it and gets a contract for a hundred thousand dollars-because that's the way record companies think."

However much Zappa's been touted as an acute sociological observer -and he willingly cops to the title-most of his schtick consists of sensitivity to, and abhorrence of, trends. The same methodology that trashed the figureheads of peace and love in We're Only in It for the Money back in 1968 is still functioning. In Joe's Garage, besides the lyric already quoted (from "Packard Goose"), there's the title track, as heavy-handed a piss-take of the three-chord cult as you'll find anywhere. It's not that he hates the genre, he just hates the conformity. "Usually, when a trend starts, once you've assessed from photographs what the clothing style is supposed to be, you're in. That's what constitutes the bulk of the participants in any movement: this army of people wearing the uniform." By contrast, he paid his audience a great compliment: "The profile of a Zappa record buyer is not very uniform."

The culprit? Restrictive mass media, especially radio. "Such a narrow spectrum is broadcast that a person doesn't have much to choose from. Your options are being narrowed down. Your taste is being manufactured for you by a program director."

"Radio as a medium can be very exciting, you know. I just spent four days being a disc jockey on WPIX, and I had a wonderful time. They picked the hits, and I played everything else. I think that out of a two hour show we played maybe five songs from their playlist, and all the rest of the stuff I picked. I put some records on the air that you never would have heard: 'Gidget Goes to Hell' by the Suburban Lawns, Jerry and the Holograms, 'Irene Does It Matter' by the Moth Men, One Ruined Life of a Bronze Tourist by Hampton B. Coles under the news. I also played some things from my old albums that never got played, like 'Debra Cadabra'; when was the last time you heard that on radio? I got away with a total of eight glorious hours during Thanksgiving week, and I think that what I did was good. I'm getting tapes of all the shows so I can play them in Los Angeles when I get back. Radio's a business, like everything else. It does stupid things that it has to do in order to support itself."

If you have to hang a tag on Zappa, call him an individualist. "I think that's the way you were born. If you want to dump it along the way, submerge yourself to become part of some larger stupidity, that's your business. But I think you'd probably have more fun if you stay true to yourself."

At heart, though, Zappa just grits his teeth and expects the worst. "When things are really stupid, when they're really stupid, I'm not surprised. What surprises me is if things turn out good-anything that rises above the general level of mediocrity. Wonderful is

something else, you know. I just think the norm of the universe is stupidity. Stupidity is like hydrogen; it's everywhere, it's the basic building block of the universe."

Jeepers, that's pessimistic. It's even depressing. By now I'm beginning to feel genuinely sorry for perhaps the most vitriolic artist of our generation. So, since it's now my turn to conduct the interview, I change the subject: Let's talk about composition.

"That's a novel question," he offers. But he's getting interested. The label he most readily applies to himself is composer. Whenever he's branded weird, Zappa admits that, yeah, a guy who likes to sit around at a piano all day scrawling little notes on paper is certainly out of step with the times. If you can get across to him that you find composing not weird, but admirable, he'll open right up. When and how did he decide to be a composer?

"I just said I was gonna do it, when I was 14. See, I was always interested in art. I used to practice, when I was a kid, drawing dollar bills. A lot of kids do that, I'm sure. Cal Schenkel, who used to do the covers of our early albums, was so good at it, he drew a five dollar bill one time and passed it; he bought his high school lunch with it.

"I'd never seen music on paper. What I had seen had been orchestra parts they give you in high school, beginner stuff. Then I saw a score. It just looked so wonderful-the very idea that this graphic representation, when translated into sound waves through the efforts of skilled craftsmen, would result in music. I said hey, I've gotta do this! So I got a ruler, I went out and bought some music paper, and I just started drawing. I didn't know what the fuck I was doing, but I could look at it. Then I went around looking for people who could play it, to find out what it would sound like. That's how I started out."

You'll note his style of expression has turned right around: no pseudoscience, a lot less distance, a lot more animation. Plainly, this is how Zappa gets off. He works out harmony and counterpoint problems like other people do crossword puzzles, and he always carries manuscript paper with him. I even spotted, in his hotel room, some of the manuscript pages for 200 Motels-huge pages that, just as he said, looked wonderful. I was awed to see how tightly written it was: even recitatives, like "Man, this stuff is great!" were exactly notated in rhythm

"What I'd like to do most right now is get my orchestral music performed. That's number one on my list of priorities. It also happens to be the singularly hardest thing to do; it's guaranteed deficit. It's easier for me to invest a lot of money in a film, because I know I'm gonna get some money back so I can do another. The minute I spend whatever it'll cost to perform that orchestral music, it's gone."

Couldn't you record it?

"Who cares about those kind of records?"

You don't think if it had your name on it, people would buy it?

"This is a popular fantasy. Most of the people who listen to my music don't give a fuck about orchestral music, by me or anybody else. If it's to survive at all, there has to be a concerted effort to save it, the same way they spend bucks to save the snail dart or any of those other little woodside knickknacks. It always looks good in a news story that we're saving some poor fish, but the cause of contemporary music is a little different; there's

such a stigma on it. Contemporary music is probably the most useless thing in America today. The frisbee is more vital and useful to America's lifestyle than contemporary music."

Hmm, maybe we shouldn't pursue this line of discussion. What else does Zappa do? He makes movies-and recently an opportunity dropped into his lap. "A German television crew was here two days ago-they came to do an interview-and they asked me what I was doing on Thanksgiving. I told them I was going out to Canarsie to have dinner with the parents of my guitarist, Warren Cuccurullo. Since I was there once before and it turned into this neighborhood extravaganza you wouldn't believe, I said chances are it's going to be another one of those, and you should film it. They did, and boy, it was incredible. You've never seen a Thanksgiving like this; the behavior was so new wave."

Zappa then describes an all-American scene staged for the benefit of German TV: the single-earringed prodigal son-gagged with panties and beaten with a whisk broom wielded by his girlfriend-plunking two-string acoustic guitar on a bed in front of his family (father from the old country) ignoring the whole thing. Zappa's audiences may not realize how few of his lyric grotesqueries derive from imagination.

Then there's Baby Snakes, which opened in New York on December 21st. It's billed as "A movie about people who do stuff that is not normal"; that sounds like Zappa's field of expertise, all right. He showed me some photos of the animation, the work of maniacally precise artist Bruce Bickford; to produce a sequence of someone shrinking Bickford constructed well over 50 clay figures in finely graduated sizes. "So far it's just playing New York, because I'm paying for everything and don't have a distribution deal yet. If the lines form around the block I'll have a deal, and then go out to the world at large."

There's also a program or promotional pamphlet being planned. Among other things, it explains the spurious looking albums Warner Bros. have issued in the last few years. Has Zappa ever considered writing a book?

"I've thought about it, but that's real time consuming and not as much fun as writing a movie. Of course, it. would probably make a hundred times as much money." Zappa fans are relatively literate.

"There's probably other people who would pick it up if the cover was cute. But I did a couple of quick research studies. I could make more money if I didn't have a band and just went out lecturing. I get lecturing offers all the time, Considering touring costs versus my net from performing, I could retire from music completely just by talking. But what a horrible way to live."

Still, you wonder why he doesn't; it's a little different from conducting interviews, which he submits to as part of his job. There's an undercurrent of rare professional ethics, a stubbornness in the face of a universal cheesiness that's as germane to his work as the derision.

"No matter what you do, when you work in a medium where other people have to assist in the production of the artifact itself, there's always the chance of problems. Any hope of unalloyed pleasure is out the window, right away. There are so many people involved that there's no way to control it. But if you don't try, it could be a lot worse."

"If something goes wrong, I get the blame for it, which I'm willing to take. I refer to my band as employees. There's a good reason for that: they refer to me as the boss. As long

as you keep it on that level you get the job done. You know who the boss really is? The audience. I work for them."

What's in it for him? This is getting too tragic. Let's talk about composition.

"Composition is a process whereby elements are organized into structure determined by the composer. This is the broadest, most general outline I can give you. If I make a film, that is a composition; it's a matter of organizing visual elements, behavioral elements, textural elements and space and time elements, the same way as I would organize notes on a piece of paper. I think of overall structure the same way. If I'm giving a performance with a band, the show itself is a composition involving sections which are smaller compositions. An interview is also a composition."

Now this is great-I'm getting an unparalleled music lesson here. What sort of structure, do you look for when you compose?

"You don't look for 'em, but I think every composer's got some idea of ideal proportions that suits personal taste. You take your raw material, your notes, your visual elements or whatever it's gonna be, and you strike up balances between loud and soft, fast and slow, many and few, thick and thin. It's like cooking, or building a mobile. The contrasts help define the structure, and at the same time they're part of the elements that are being structured. Know what I mean?"

I guess I've got that much. After all, here I'm turning a bunch of quotes-dialogue elements, you might say-into a composition called an article. Tell me more!

"Well, then, try to imagine it happening in a macrostructural sense between fifteen years of albums."

Ulp. Suddenly he's the mad scientist again. A vision that unites his whole body of work, and projects it into the future, is truly scary.

Now that I'm considering it, Joe's Garage bothers me. I'm convinced anew that Frank Zappa is a genius, one of the most intelligent people in rock, but his records can be appallingly stupid-especially these last few. The theme of the Joe's Garage set (two albums, containing three one-act discs between them) fits in with his abhorrence of senseless conformity. However, the scenario, which he admits right off is dumb, is that the government uses music as a scapegoat for social ills. The plot is even drearier, a concatenation of progressively less savory sexual encounters that ultimately render Joe a mental vegetable, suited only for work as a muffin man. (Get the reference?)

Zappa exercises his unique compositional chops, but you have to look pretty hard. Bizarre synthetic rumbles, tape effects, uneven rhythms, etc., tend to be buried deep in dense mixes: under a fog of disco, reggae, ersatz '50s, ersatz heavy metal and genuine skating rink music. There are half a dozen commendable guitar solos and one characteristically enjoyable blues jam, entitled "Crew Slut" (which is what happens to Joe's girlfriend to send him on the path to destruction). For any long-term fans still listening, there are liberal cross-references to earlier albums (is that how he defines the big structure?), as well as allusions to cultural phenomenon like the Who, Al DiMeola and the Seeds.

I get this picture of Zappa as an immense oyster. He has the capacity to take a social irritant and spew all over it until it becomes a pearl. But the gems are increasingly rare, and most of the time he simply huddles inside his shell. But then, he makes his home in LA-perhaps the trendiest locale in the country, and hence a horrible environment for him.

"For my job I'd have to live there or in New York, and Hollywood's better for the kids. I brought the family east once, last Christmas. We were living in this tiny little apartment, staring out the window at all the big tall buildings, and all Dweezil [aged 9] could think of was when was Spiderman gonna come crawling up the walls?"

Do the kids get shot from their peers for those names?

"No-another myth exploded. They're pretty much accepted for who they are, rather than who I am. Moon Unit's getting into disco music now."

One last question. That beard, the little button with framing walrus mustache that's become a Zappa symbol: has its story ever been told?

"Nobody's ever asked me. I thought it looked good on bluesman Johnny Otis, so I grew it."

Frank Zappa (1988)

By Kurt Loder
Bat Chain Puller, 1990

Frank Zappa is a very smart and funny man who could still make it as a stand-up monologuist, should he ever so choose. But Zappa has instead chosen to pursue his musical inclinations into an area of compositional sophistication that pretty much eliminates any chance of scoring a Top Ten teen single any time in the near future. So does he give up, give in, reunite the Mothers of Invention for a twenty-fifth-anniversary reunion tour? No way. Zappa runs his own record label these days, catering to his hard-core audience. He also does business commentaries for the Financial News Network and has audiences with the president of Czechoslovakia – a newly liberated land in which, as this is written, he's attempting to facilitate the installation of a Ben & Jerry's ice cream outlet.

A self-taught musician and social theorist, Zappa made challenging records with the Mothers of Invention back in the Sixties (including the first "concept" album, Freak Out, which predated the Beatles' Sgt. Pepper opus by two years). Apart from his generational fondness for Fifties doo-wop and R&B music, he has little Interest in commercial teen pop, and if that precludes him from ever having a megamassive multiplatinum monster chart hit . . . well, okay. He'll find other things to do – such as lambasting the hapless ladies of the Parents' Music Resource Center (the rock-record rating group) and lecturing the feckless music industry itself on the importance of the First Amendment. The objects of his ire rarely find much to laugh about in such broadsides, but Zappa remains one of rock's sharpest wits.

Were you a comedian as a kid?

I tried to be. It was a little rough, because I had a mustache when I was eleven, big pimples, and I weighed about 180 pounds. I first found out that I could make people laugh when I was forced to give a little speech about ferns in a class in school. I don't know what made them laugh, but they laughed, so I thought, "All right, not bad." So I tried to develop it into a . . . I won't say a fern routine . . ."

What was it that first attracted you to music in the early Fifties?

The first music that I heard that I liked was Arab music. But I can't imagine where I heard it, because my parents didn't even have a record player until I was fifteen. Then, finally, they got a record player, and I think the first rhythm & blues record that I got was "Riot in Cell Block #9" by the Robins. And shortly thereafter, I read an article about Edgard Varèse in Look magazine, and I found the Varèse album, and so that's what I had. I had the Robins and Varèse , and I think I got "Work with Me, Annie," by Hank Ballard and the Midnighters, too.

Did you see any sort of dichotomy between the Varèse and the R&B records?

No, not at all. I saw it as a totally unified field theory. What appealed to me in the Varèse album was that the writing was so direct. It was like here's a guy who's writing dissonant music and he's not fucking around. And here's a group called the Robins, and they didn't seem like they were fucking around, either. They were havin' a good time. Certainly Hank

Ballard and the Midnighters sounded like they were having a good time. And although harmonically, rhythmically and in many other superficial ways it was very different, the basic soul of the music seemed to me to be coming from the same universal source. You know: a guy who had the nerve to stand up and say, "This is my song, like it or lump it."

You taught yourself to read and compose music at an early age, but I gather you weren't otherwise a model student in high school.

I was getting thrown out all the time for various antisocial acts. My father was worried about keeping his security clearance.

One of your fellow students was Don Van Vliet whom you later recorded as Captain Beefheart. What was he like then?

He drove a light-blue Oldsmobile with a hand-sculpted werewolf head that replaced the Olds emblem in the center of the steering wheel. His father was a Helms bread-truck driver. Don didn't spend a lot of time in school; most of the time I saw him was at his house. We would listen to rhythm & blues records in the afternoon, and then at night the most exciting thing to do in Lancaster would be go to Denny's and have a cup of coffee. 'Cause there was nothin' – I mean, places shut down at six o'clock. Really bad. So in order to afford this trip to Denny's, Don would have to acquire the finances by opening the back of his father's bread truck. See, the cab was locked, and the change maker was hanging in the front. He had to undo the back door, pull out this bread drawer which was about from here to the wall, put it in a driveway and force Laurie, his girlfriend, to crawl through this slot like a squid to get in there and steal change. Then he'd pull her out by the ankles, and that's how we would finance our entertainment.

By the early Sixties, you'd moved to Cucamonga and started working in a small recording studio there. What kind of place was that?

It was built by a guy named Pall Buff. Paul is a genius, a great guy. Most places in those days were far-out if they had a three-track machine. Paul built his own five-track recording machine so he could do overdubs. He built this studio from scratch out of just garbage, using knowledge that he learned when he was in the Marines. And it was a great place. "Wipeout" was recorded in that studio, in one session. A little-known fact.

I was brought over there by Ronnie Williams, a musician I'd been jamming with in local bars. During that period of time, which was roughly '61, '62, there were these things called novelty records, you know? Like "Please, Mr. Custer." Radio still had a slight sense of humor. So if you could do a novelty record, the chances were you could lease it to a record company. I wrote one, and Paul and I leased the master to Capitol for the unheard-of sum of a $700 advance. I mean, that was a whopper. And the reason was because this record looked like it was gonna be unbelievably hot. You know why? It was called "The Big Surfer," and what it was, it was a guy – a San Bernardino disc jockey named Brian Lord – who could do Kennedy's voice better than Kennedy. It was like a take-off on the First Family album, where Kennedy is judging a surf contest. And totally produced – sound effects, the whole business, okay? The unfortunate part of the record was the punchline: the winner of the contest got an all-expense-paid trip as the first member of the Peace Corps to be sent to Alabama. Well, shortly after we signed the contract, Medgar Evers got killed, and Capitol refused to release the record.

You were expecting this to be your big breakthrough?

Yeah, well, it could've been. It was a cool record.

You also did the soundtrack for a movie called The World's Greatest Sinner at that Cucamonga Studio. What kind of movie was that?

It was a feature film produced, directed by and starring Timothy Carey.... I did the score and the rock & roll theme song for it. The premise of the film was: a man believes he's God, doubts himself, breaks into a church, steals the communion bread, sticks a pin in it to find out whether or not it will in fact bleed, it bleeds, and he realizes he's not God. How's that for a great plot?

You almost made your own movie in Cucamonga, with Don Van Vliet in the title role. But then came your "porno" bust. What exactly was that all about?

Well, there's aspects of it that I still really don't understand. I was trying to make a science-fiction movie in a store-front building in Cucamonga, okay? I had the recording studio, and I had enough space in the back to actually put up sets and shoot the thing. I had gone to an auction at a place in Hollywood called the F.K. Rocket Studios. They were going out of business, and for fifty dollars I got a flatbed truck full of scenery. So I was ready to make a movie. And the name of the movie was Captain Beefheart vs. the Grunt People. I had also got, as part of this blob of scenery, a sign that said TV PICTURES – a nice red sign with gold lettering on it.

Now, my little place was directly across the street from the holy roller church and half a block away from a grammar school. In a town where, if I had hair half as long as yours, I would be considered a menace to society, and the approved dress code for men was white short-sleeved shirts – T-shirts were a mark of unusual behavior. That's Cucamonga. So here I am living in this studio, and living there with me were two white girls and a black baby.

How did they. . . ?

It's real complicated. They didn't have a place to stay, you know? I was helping them out. And in order for me to earn a living – since there weren't surf bands beating down my door to record yet another "Wipeout" there I worked on weekends playing guitar at this barbecue joint in Sun Village, up near Lancaster, seventy-five miles away. I got seven dollars a weekend only job I could get. Anyway, while I'm up there doing my gig, apparently, these two girls had gone out in front of the studio and were playing on the street with the black baby – which offended all parties concerned in this little village. So, the next thing I know, I got this guy knocking on my door saying he was a used-car salesman – saw the sign, they're having this party and can I make an entertaining movie for him? He starts talking nickles and dimes. I said, "You don't understand. Making movies is expensive. Tell you what if you guys just want to have some laughs, let me make you a tape." So we agreed on the price of $100 to make this piece of entertainment material for used-car salesmen. I thought of this as a great entertainment challenge, myself. He was supposed to pick it up the following morning. I didn't realize that while he was in there, he was broadcasting our conversation by way of a wrist radio, out to a truck.

A wrist radio?

Yeah. It was total Dick Tracy. And while we're having this conversation, he is specifying in medical terms the activities that should be manifested on this tape. And, I mean, I'd never been near a policeman. I had no idea that this guy – Detective Willis, I think his name was – was an undercover anything. To me, it was a fuckin' joke, okay? I mean, the minute the man started talking about "oral copulation," I should've gone, "Huh?" But, no, I didn't. Because remember, I was making seven dollars a weekend up there in Sun Village.

So he leaves and I set up the recording equipment, and me and one of the girls go into this place I was using for my bedroom. There was absolutely no sex involved in this tape. It was just squeaking bedsprings and grunt, grunt, ooh, ooh, ahh, ahh, ahh. So I got this master tape of grunts. I had to cut all the laughter out of it, it was so absurd. Then I superimposed some background music onto it, so it was, like, produced. It was no more bizarre than side four of the Freak Out! album.

The guy comes in the next day, hands me fifty dollars. I said, "We agreed on $100. No deal." The tape never changed hands. Next thing I know, the door flies open – flashbulbs, handcuffs. It was like Nazi Germany. They snatched everything out of the place – reels of tape that had nothing to do with this films, projectors, everything. I didn't have any money, so I had to plead nolo contendere. A twenty-six-year-old junior district attorney from San Bernardino County refused to let me go on probation, so I was given six months with all but ten days suspended, plus three years' probation. And as I was sitting in the holding tank waiting for the San Bernardino jail bus to pick me up, I'm visited by this Detective Willis, who says, "If you'll allow us to determine which of your other tapes are obscene, I'll give you back all the rest, erased." And I said, "It is not within my power to convert you from a policeman to a judge."

Your luck began improving in 1964, when you hooked up With the Soul Giants, the band that became the first Mothers of Invention. What were they like when you came upon them?

They were pretty good. I already knew that Ray [Collins] was a good singer; we'd recorded before that. But the thing that impressed me about the Soul Giants, being a rhythm & blues buff, was Jimmy Carl Black – the only drummer I'd ever seen who actually could sound like Jimmy Reed's drummer.

Really?

Yeah. Think about it: the absolute disregard for technique, know what I mean? The total dedication to going boom-bap, boom-bap. A rare talent.

So you convinced these guys you could make them rich?

No. I told 'em, "Let's learn more original songs and try and get a record contract." And the sax player, a guy named Davy Coronado – it was his group – he says, "You can't do that. The minute you start playing original music you'll get fired from these clubs." And he was right. We learned original music and we got fired . . . and fired and fired and fired.

You finally did land a record deal, though, and you've been at it ever since. Do you think the music business has changed at all since those days, for better or worse?

Oh, I can't imagine one instance in which the music business has changed for the better. Not one. Twenty-three years before the mast, me boy, and I can't think of one thing that is

better about the business than when I started. The fact of the matter is, it's gotten to be more business and less music. Now, all the decisions about what is musical are made by accountants and fashion advisers. In the old days, they had these guys with cigars sticking out of the side of their mouths – this was before they had nonsmoking areas in the office buildings. A new act would come in, and these guys with the cigars would shrug their shoulders and go, "I don't know!" And because the signing fee was so cheap . . . I mean, our fee with MGM to make Freak Out! was $2500 – yeah, split between four guys. And we were lucky to get it. And the reason we did was because somebody went, "I don't know! Who knows what these kids are listening to?"

Apparently, Tom Wilson, the young staff producer who signed the Mothers to MGM, did know.

Tom Wilson was a great guy. He had vision, you know? And he really stood by us. When we did that first album, he was definitely in a state of "I don't know!" by the time we did the second song. I remember the first thing that we recorded was "Any Way the Wind Blows," and that was okay. Then we did "Who Are the Brain Police?" and I saw him through the glass and he was on the phone immediately to New York going, "I don't know!" Trying to break it to 'em easy, I guess. Some things you just don't break easily, though.

What did MGM make of Freak Out! when it was done?

Well, they were violently opposed to it for several reasons. One, they were convinced that no radio station would ever play a record by a group called the Mothers – and by God, they were right! But not for the reason they thought. Anyway, they demanded that we either change the name of our group or not be recording artists. So, out of necessity, we became the Mothers of Invention.

And how did the album do?

According to their books, Freak Out! sold maybe 30,000 units when it first came out. But I think it sold a lot more, because that was during the time when they were having these problems with . . . how do I describe this? . . . "loose security at the pressing plant." It was something called pressing overruns. The company would send in a pressing order for 15,000 albums; the plant would press 15,000, and then they would leave the presses running for another 15,000. And the second 15,000 would not be reported to your royalty account. They would go into the back of somebody's car and be shipped across the state line and be traded for rooms full of furniture or favors or whatever. And they did it to us, they did it to . . . the biggest loser was the Dr. Zhivago soundtrack – I heard a quarter of a million units out the back door. Think of the publishing royalties on that for Maurice Jarre. MGM was a piquant company in those days. But people said, "I don't know!"

The Mothers became emblems of the L.A. "freak scene" – which was what, exactly?

It was a pretty short-lived phenomenon, actually. Because by the time it made the papers, it was dead. It was a thriving anthropological success for about a year and a half before any notice ever went into Time magazine. By the time they ran that first photograph – of a guy who used to be called Buffalo Bob; he had Prince Valiant hair, you know? – the cops were already chasing the kids out of Cantor's and off the street. They closed down every place where a band could work.

So you decided to move the Mothers to New York.

I believed that all the opportunities for performing were right here, even though the scene, as such, hadn't happened. There was no long hair here, there was nothin'. That's where that line came from: "Oh, my hair's getting good in the back." You used to hear these kids coming in from Long Island, with little rags around their heads that's an actual quote from one of them.

And you perceived the of a scene erupting?

Yeah. I figured, look: If it could happen in Los Angeles, where nobody really walks around) what could happen in a place where they had neighborhoods? Think of it: endless potential. So we set up in the Garrick Theater, on Bleecker Street. Four-walled our own show in there. And pretty soon the Fugs were four-walling theirs around the corner, and there was a lot of stuff goin' on. It was neat.

How were the Mothers received in New York?

We opened during Easter vacation of 1967. Freezing cold. It was snowing. But we had lines around the block for two shows a night. We thought: Oh, this is it, this is the big one. We're in New York City, and there's lines around the block. As soon as school went back in, we had three, maybe five people a night. We played the shows anyway. When the place was empty, it gave us opportunities for a more personalized type of entertainment. Say there were three people in there. We'd go downstairs to the Cafe a Go-Go, put towels over our arms like waiters, come back up and serve them hot cider and stuff and sit and talk with them for the duration of the show. That was the show. Other times, there'd be five or six people come in, and we'd offer them our instruments – we sat in the audience and let them play. We'd do anything. Anything qualified as entertainment then. It was all in the spirit of it.

You also recorded two albums during that stay in New York: We're Only in It for the Money and Cruisin' with Ruben and the Jets – the latter a tribute to the doo-wop and R&B music of your youth. How did the boys in the band respond to making that record ?

Well, some of them liked it and some of them didn't, you know? Every band I've ever had, there's been a few R&B buffs and a few guys that always scratched their heads because they couldn't understand why that was anything worth being excited about. Usually, the great musicians – guys who really have technical chops – don't know anything about rhythm & blues. That part of their musical life is completely missing. They have no comprehension of it. They were somewhere else when that took place.

I've always thought that Ruben and the Jets contained some of your sweetest, most emotional music. Why haven't you done more along that line?

Well, I don't know whether doing emotional music is a mark of excellence. That's been one of my downfalls with rock critics, 'cause they all seem to have this feeling that the more emotional it is, the better it is. And that's not my aesthetic at all. A little of each, you know? I like skill in music.

Is that why you've always been opposed to your musicians using drugs, and why you've been such an outspoken non-drug-user yourself ?

I've smoked ten marijuana cigarettes in my life, and probably the last time I had one near my face was twelve, fifteen years ago. And the reason I did was because, since I do smoke, people would say, "Here, smoke this, you'll get high." So I smoked it, and it gave me a sore throat and made me sleepy. And I must either presume that that's what high means, or something was wrong. But I've never had a positive result from smoking marijuana. It just wasn't my cup of tea. And I never used LSD, never used cocaine, never used heroin or any of that other stuff.

What did you think, back in the hippie days, when you saw all those people getting stoned and purporting to play far-out music.

Well, basically, I saw assholes in action.

You and the Mothers once shared a stage with John Lennon and Yoko Ono and wound up on their Some Time in New York City album. How did that gig come about?

It was 1971, and we were working at the Fillmore East, and we had a recording truck set up out there, because we were doing an album. And we'd played one night until about three in the morning, and I was sound asleep the next afternoon when I heard this knock. I opened the door and here's this guy from The Village Voice, with John Lennon standing next to him and this microphone aimed at my face, waiting to record my first gasp of whatever. I said, "Come on in." And the first thing John said to me was, "You're not as ugly as you look in your pictures." I thanked him very much and offered him a chair. I told him we were working at the Fillmore East and, you know, "How'd you like to come down and sit in?" I thought it'd be good for a few laughs. So he said yeah, and they did.

Now the horrible part of the story. During our time onstage, a number of pieces were improvised, but a number of pieces that were played were absolutely written compositions that had already been on other albums – namely, a song of mine called "King Kong." The deal that I made with John and Yoko was that we were both to have access to the tapes and could deploy them any way we wanted. They got a duplicate copy of the master, and they mixed it their way. I had a copy of the master, and I was gonna mix it and put it out as part of this Mothers album. They put out this record and took "King Kong" – which obviously has a tune, and a rhythm, and chord changes – and they called it "Jam Rag," and accredited the writing and publishing to themselves. Take a look at the album.

What did you do?

I talked to Yoko last year, and I said, "By the way, you remember that 'Jam Rag'?" She said, "Well, we have a problem with Capitol Records. We are suing them, you know."

I can't imagine that album really sold a lot, anyway. It's the principle of the thing, you know? The other thing that was kind of sad was, there's a song on there called "Scumbag," but the way they mixed it, you can't hear what Mark and Howard are singing. There's a reason for that. They're singing, "Now Yoko's in the scumbag, we're putting Yoko in a scumbag."

Some critics would undoubtedly see that as part of your penchant for cheap smuttiness. Even today, you're still soliciting women's underwear from your audiences, and you keep a clothesline full of panties strung across your stage set. Do you have some sort of secret fetish for panties, or what?

Not on my part. But we used to have two guys in the band who were panty fetishists. It was a way to make them happy and to make the girls in the audience happy, too. I also think it's a good look for the stage. I think a stage with a clothesline full of women's underwear has a certain aroma to it. you know what I mean? We even have an underpants roadie – the same guy who takes care of the Synclavier. It's true.

As far as the smuttiness in the lyrics goes, a person can only be offended by smuttiness if they believe in smut as a concept and believe in the concept of dirty words – which I don't. It's always seemed to be something that bothered rock writers more than anybody else. I mean, who the fuck are these rock writers, anyway?

You finally decided to retire the Mothers of Invention in 1977. Why ?

Well, for one thing, what the Mothers were famous for – this wild and woolly weirdness of the Sixties – had pretty much vanished from our stage show.

How come?

Because as you get musicians who can do certain musical things, you also find out that they sometimes lack a sense of humor. Or lack that particular aesthetic that makes it possible to take a toothbrush and a baby doll and a salami and a head of lettuce and a jar of mayonnaise and make entertainment out of it, you know? Not everyone can do that.

But you've soldiered on. Do you find that your audiences today come mainly to hear your new music – or to see a living legend from the fabled Sixties?

Look, the people at these concerts are literally fanatic. There's kids that have tickets to nineteen shows. They've taken off from work, they're living in the park – they're way into it. That's not living-legend time. I think the whole idea of a resurgence of interest in things from the Sixties is grossly over-estimated. There's a huge wishful-thinking factor attached to it on the part of Sixties-age people who wish that it were so. But younger kids don't give a rat's ass about the Sixties, and there's no reason why they should.

I did an interview with a guy from a paper, and he said, "What do you think of today's music?" I said, "We are today's music. We are it, like it or lump it. What do you mean? Do you think that what I'm doing is something imaginary? We're out there today. We're doing it. It's alive."

This interview is taken from Geir Corneliussen's now defunct Packard Goose site. The interview was titled there (and in many places more) as "Rolling Stone interview". Kurt Loder made this interview for Rolling Stone, but the interview was never published there. Loder's book Bat Chain Puller, 1990, is the first publication of this interview and in the book the interview was titled "Frank Zappa (1988)".

Signs Of The Times

By Bob Guccione, Jr.

Spin, July, 1991

The image of Frank Zappa as a mad scientist has, like a stubborn vine, so entwined itself through the garden of rock n' roll mythology that its origin is completely indiscernible. But when I meet him in the dark living room that appears to be the center of the Zappa universe, he is dressed in a t-shirt and beach pants, and his long gray-streaked hair and moustache accentuate the intensity of his eyes and he looks more like a wizard in exile.

His most famous song is "Don't Eat the Yellow Snow," released back when the '70s still had credibility, and the most familiar Zappa record isn't even his, it's his daughter Moon Unit's "Valley Girl," which he collaborated on. Yet a generation that not only didn't grow up on his music but were mostly not even born when he first became popular has accepted his place of prominence. Like an ambassador, he means something, stands for something strong and resolute, but this generation is not really sure how and exactly why.

In his 25-year career as a recording artist, he has released 50 records: As of this writing, which is to say this morning—I can't vouch that he won't issue something later today. He has created almost every type of music from rock n' roll to classical. Hardly a staple of MTV, the image of a conservatively suited Zappa testifying before the Senate at the infamous "Porn Rock" hearings in 1985 is his thumbprint on video culture: a soundbite from a sound banquet.

He speaks in a deep voice and with intellectual precision articulates his world view, which is dark, passionate, and finally optimistic.

SPIN: Is education really out of touch now in this country? Are we twenty years away, a whole generation away, from repairing education in this country?

Zappa: No, we're further than that. Because in a way, I would agree with George Bush in that education in America needs to be reinvented, but certainly not in the way he would imagine it. Because the biggest problem we're facing right now is that education needs to imparted to a postliterate generation. People who have no feeling whatsoever for a book or any data on a printed page, which should be worrisome to anyone who publishes a magazine.

SPIN: It is.

Zappa: And you have to teach people basic things that they will need in order to function normally, forget about achieving greatness, or even competing with Japan and Germany. Just to function, how are you going to do it if people can't read, refuse to read, and are so adapted to receiving data from optical and audio sources. I think you have to meet them halfway and install equipment into classrooms that are going to be able to deliver data into the language that the kids already understand. Costs money. And when you've got a state like California, with such a huge educational system willing to take up the twelve billion dollar deficit out of the schools, it also tells you something about the parents that would allow that to happen. Because obviously the parents don't give a fuck, 'cause they didn't enjoy school that much themselves. And giving the choice between paying more taxes and

just hoping that it gets better and letting the "education President" take care of it, I mean, everybody is sticking their head in the sand.

SPIN: Do you think somewhere along the line, it serves the powers that be, the pervading government for the last 10 years, to have education dilapidate to where people don't think enough to really challenge?

Zappa: No question. I don't think it's any accident that the educational system in America has been brought to its current state. Because only a totally uneducated mass of people will be baffled by balloons. And yellow ribbons and little flags and buzz words and guys saying "new world order" and shit like that, I mean, only a person who has been dissuaded from any kind of critical thinking and doesn't know geography, doesn't know the English language—I mean if you can't speak English, then this stuff works on you.

One of the things that was taken out of the curriculum was civics. Civics was a class that used to be required before you could graduate from high school. You were taught what was in the U.S. Constitution. And after all the student rebellions in the '60s, civics was banished from the student curriculum and was replaced by something called social studies. Here we live in a country that has a fabulous constitution and all these guarantees, a contract between the citizens and the government—nobody knows what's in it. It's one of the best kept secrets. And so, if you don't know what your rights are, how can you stand up for them? And furthermore, if you don't know what is in that document, how can you care if someone is shredding it?

SPIN: What was your reaction after the Gulf War, and the jingoism and the euphoria that followed?

Zappa: Well I had a very bad reaction to the war in general because it was such an incredibly stupid idea to do it. All you got to do is look at what's happening in Iraq this week, and see whether it was a good idea to send a half a million guys over there to blow shit up. It's a bad idea. So I look at it as the utter failure of diplomacy, the utter failure, embarrassing failure of the U.N. to stand up for any of the original principles that it was supposedly constructed to uphold. It was well worded into putting a rubber stamp on the war, because George Bush decides that there ought to be something called the new world order. I did an interview with a German television station not long ago, and the guy said: " 'New world order,' doesn't he know that Hitler said that? That is a Hitler line."

SPIN: What's your theory of why America didn't finish off the war, why we left Saddam in power?

Zappa: First of all, there's no guarantee you can get him. The other thing is, on *Crossfire* last night, Stephen Solarz was arguing that we should start the war again and go in there and not just get rid of Saddam Hussein, but root out every aspect of the Baathist Party in Iraq. Tell me, what the fuck kind of tweezers are you going to need to do that? If you kill Saddam Hussein the Baathist Party—it's just like trying to get the Communist Party out of Russia. At every level. There's Baathist Party guys running everything. Plus five different forms of secret police. How are you going to do that?

The thing is, there's nothing more threatening to those bogus monarchs down there than democracy. If the Kurds and the Shiites succeed in toppling Hussein's government and they go for a democratic parliament and the rest of that stuff, if that trickles southward then it endangers the Kuwait [Emir] and the whole Saudi royal family. *They* don't want democracy anywhere near that peninsula. And also from the U.S. national interest point of view it's probably easier for our business guys to deal with one corrupt monarch or another

then to deal with some unruly democratic parliament. It's easier to pay off one guy and the rest of his relatives.

SPIN: In think in many ways the reaction to this was was an attempt not only to exorcise the Vietnam syndrome, but to distract attention from how screwed up we were in the '80s.

Zappa: The only way you can feel good about the '80s is if you can't feel anything at all. In a ten-year period, twelve percent of the homeless are Vietnam vets with nowhere to go, maybe thirty percent were dumped out of mental institutions when Reagan closed them in the early part of the '80s, and the rest of the people were families that got dispossessed during Reagan's depression during '82-'83, when his economics first took its toll, and other people are making a zillion dollars in the stock market by selling junk bonds, and renting puffed air to each other.

So to feel good about the '80s, I think you would have to be mutated away from the human condition quite a bit, because if you look at the '80s, there was nothing that swell about it. Fortunately for us the music of that period leaves an accurate record of how empty that whole era was.

SPIN: Do you think much music came out of the '80s that was valid, as music or as social criticism?

Zappa: Well, I kept doing it. I'm sure there were a few people in America who did it, but you never heard it, because the bulk of what you heard is what you saw. The beginning of the '80s gave us MTV, and music changed and switched from an audio to a video medium.

SPIN: For better or worse?

Zappa: For worse, because I believe that the way music is to be consumed is through your ears, and it shouldn't be too important whether the person performing it looks like a model.

The record companies thought it was the greatest thing that ever happened to them because it was a way for them to get cheap commercials. And so the tail started wagging the dog. The record companies stopped signing groups that could play in favor of groups that looked good in pictures because they figured we could always get a producer to sing their songs and do their stuff for them, and that happened plenty of times. So you get a bunch of models to make the video and forget about the music. So that part of that worked. A young audience who never experienced any music to speak of started watching MTV the same way they watched Saturday morning cartoons. And it caught on. There was no competition. Before MTV if you wanted to have a hit record, there were probably 10,000 stations in America where you could break something regionally and have it spread. Now there is one MTV with a short playlist, and because of that the record companies put their own balls into the bear trap and sprung it on themselves, now they can't make a move without calling MTV and getting permission, they call up in advance to say we are getting ready to make a video, we are going to have such and such pictures in it, what do you think, and MTV is a total censorship organization and it has all the major record companies at its mercy.

I started getting really weary of MTV when they started inventing rock n' wrestling, where we're seeing videos of Hulk Hogan urging kids to take their vitamins, urging kids to grow up big and strong like him, and be an American. It really was on the level of a Saturday morning cartoon.

SPIN: What do you think of the crossover of rap? I don't mean Vanilla Ice, because that's just a cartoon character thing too, but the crossover of heavy black rap, and style and fashion taken on by whites.

Zappa: I don't find anything strange or wrong with that.

SPIN: No, I don't either. But how do you explain it?

Zappa: Well, there's a corollary when those black groups were singing about their girlfriends in the '50s. Because not everyone that bought those records was a black teenager in Manual Arts High School. And there were white suburban teenagers who were going, "I know a girl with the same name." It was their tune for life. If the music speaks to you then I don't it makes a difference what the race or orientation is. Besides, today, rage is rage. Rage is a commodity. And the unfortunate aspect is that I know there's white suburban rage, but there is no voice for it.

I believe they do have things that they are pissed off about, but I don't think they've found a vehicle to express it, because if the white suburban kid decides to do rap, then he's not using his voice, he's just shouting through someone else's rented megaphone. And it's not too unique or original, and at one point, if you do that, it's like you're copying off someone else's commercial gimmick. And it takes away from the authenticity of whatever else you have to say.

SPIN: You've gotten involved in doing business in Czechoslovakia. What has failed in Eastern Europe?

Zappa: The United States Government.

SPIN: What do you mean by that?

Zappa: Because after all these years of saying "We'd love to be rid of Communism," and then we built up these weapons to destroy Communism, and this huge army, it rots before your very eyes, and you've got this opportunity to go in and spread democracy, which all the Presidents have talked about. "This is democracy, it's good, everyone should have it, our way is the best," and all it would have taken is a couple of bucks, and some advisers to say, "Here's how a free-market system works" and a little friendly help. And that just wasn't there.

SPIN: What was your background? Your father worked in a nerve gas company?

Zappa: Well it wasn't nerve gas, it was mustard gas.

SPIN: Is it true he volunteered to be an experiment?

Zappa: That was a way during the war you could earn extra money, you could be a human guinea pig for these things called pap tests. They wouldn't tell you what it was, they would put stuff on your skin and then cover it up with a big bandage. So he'd have these big bandages on his arm, and sometimes come home with two or three on his arms, and they'd itch and burn, and he'd suffer with these things, but they'd be thirty dollars more a week. And I don't know what they put on it.

SPIN: What was it like growing up in that environment—how aware of that were you?

Zappa: I thought I understood it pretty well at five or six years old. It was about killing people. My father worked at a place that manufactured stuff to kill people.

SPIN: And how did that affect you. Looking back now, forty-five years later, how did it affect you?

Zappa: That was WWII. There was a reason for going out and doing those things. Everybody has a different outlook. And the other thing was that he was a Sicilian, and it was not a good idea to be of Sicilian or Italian extraction at that point in American History; he had to try extra-hard to be patriotic, I think.

SPIN: How does that affect you today?

Zappa: It give me some kind of perspective of how long we've been doing these things. At least forty to forty-five years.

SPIN: What did you think of punk?

Zappa: Well I liked the attitude of punk, I didn't necessarily like it from a musical standpoint; it is anti-musical. The whole idea was we're gonna play shitty and fast and so what? The so what part I always like. But anybody who's against music I don't like. I don't like people who smash instruments. I don't like the abuse of things that could produce beautiful results.

SPIN: Did you find any punk musically good? What about the Clash?

Zappa: One of my favorite punk records was "Gidget Goes to Hell" by the Suburban Lawns—I thought that was good.

SPIN: Did you ever make any punk records?

Zappa: Oh sure, yeah.

SPIN: You made punk records?

Zappa: Not whole records, but some punk tunes: "I'm So Cute" on the *Sheik Yerbouti* album.

SPIN: What do you think about the sexism in heavy metal, and in Andrew Dice Clay routines, and in rap? How do you relate that to the criticism against you in the past, the way you allegedly depicted women in your songs?

Zappa: I don't think there's anything wrong with depicting women the way I depict them. I think I depict them in a rather accurate way. Because women are not perfect. But the bulk of my songs are about men and the stupid things that men do. And they never complain. So, is it because the men are so inferior—which then proves the women's point, that they're so fucking stupid they don't know what to do, or they're too lazy to complain—or is it because women think they really should get special treatment and they should be treated with kid gloves, like Israel sort of? You could never say anything bad about Israel or people would say you're anti-Semitic. If you happen to say that Israel behaves like Nazi Germany toward the Palestinians, which happens to look like quite a fact when you see a videotape of what's actually going on, people go "Oh, you're anti-Semitic." You know, it's not true. The same way, if you say "Women do this thing that's stupid or that thing that's stupid," you should say it. It's a journalistic medium as well as a musical medium.

SPIN: What's the thing you've been most criticized for, in sexist terms?

Zappa: "Jewish Princess" [from *Sheik Yerbouti*]. The criticism came from an organized entity, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith. As if to say there was no such thing as a Jewish Princess. Like I invented this? They asked me to apologize. I said no. I told them I

wouldn't. And they managed to get PR for their organization for a year out of me. And actually it helped me. The *Sheik Yerbouti* album turned out to be the best-selling album I ever had.

SPIN: Do you think the outcome of the censorship movement can ultimately be meaningful?

Zappa: Let me point out something about democracy. Does anybody remember how Hitler took over Germany? He was voted in. People said, yeah, he's got the right message for us. Now when you have a democracy, there's always the possibility that the guy who could turn out to be the biggest menace to the planet could just get voted in. And the place where it's most likely to happen is here, because of the media saturation, the illiteracy rate of the population, the social desperation of the population. Hitler came to power because things weren't so good.

All we have to do is look at the early days of the Reagan administration and see how these factors converge. First of all, he owed a big favor to all the fundamentalist Christians and the television evangelists who helped him one way or another get elected. Forget about the October Surprise, he also had the help of these other groups. Then there was that depression. Americans like to believe in miracles, they like to believe in magic and when they consume religion it's not on a philosophical level, it's on a miraculous level. Jesus can do things for you. It's about goods, it's about the transference of goods and services from the cloud to your living room. You're broke, you lost your job in the early days of the Reagan administration and instead of watching Madonna on TV you're seeing these guys teaching prosperity theology. If you send your money, you gotta prove to Jesus that you really care, and he'll reward you tenfold. It's like buying a lottery ticket.

It's always the free flow of information which is the major threat to the American way of life. To right-wing guys, there's nothing more dangerous than free access to information. And you know what that stems from? It stems from the beginning of Christian theology, when Adam and Eve were in the garden, how did we get into trouble? It wasn't because it was an apple, it was the fruit of the tree of knowledge, so the essence of Christianity is, nobody gets to be smarter than God and access to knowledge and ownership of knowledge damns you. Knowledge itself is the work of the devil. We must not have knowledge and what leads to knowledge? Information. Nip it right there, nip it in the bud.

SPIN: What would it take to puncture the apathy of the average American, especially with elections coming up? Campaigns for that election will start in less than a year.

Zappa: I don't think you're going to puncture it in one swell swoop. It doesn't puncture that easily. I'll tell you, I'm thinking of running for President in the next election.

SPIN: Really?

Zappa: Yeah. I've called two political consultants in Washington and we're just gonna do a little feasibility study to see what it would take. The idea is to run as a nonpartisan candidate and urge other people around the country to not only run but resign from the Democratic and the Republican parties because the Democrats stand for nothing except "I wish I was a Republican" and the Republicans stand for raw, unbridled evil and greed and ignorance smothered in balloons and ribbons. So that's really not much of a choice and it's nauseating to watch Democrats make speeches because they all wish they were Republicans.

SPIN: What do you think your chances will be?

Zappa: Not good, but a chance is a chance.

SPIN: You're very serious about this? You're not just making a statement?

Zappa: If I did run I would do a real run. The problems about doing it are that in order to do a credible run you have to be on the ballot in every state. That's about a million dollars in legal fees and organization and bullshit just to get on the ballot. That's before you even buy an ad.

The theory that I have is this: Instead of going out and running the same way the other guys do for one thing I got no primary that I have to compete in, I don't have to go to Iowa, I don't have to go to New Hampshire, I don't have to join the greased pig race, I don't have to do any of that stuff. All I have to do is say, I'm gonna volunteer to run, I'm willing to do this. I'm willing to give up music for four years. I like this country enough that I'll give up something that I love for four years to do this job that nobody is doing right here.

George Bush, what has he really done here? He brought the troops home. He never should have sent the fucking troops there! And we read his lips, and now this education President thing. That's going to turn into a fiasco.

One of the interesting things about my platform is I want to do away with income tax.

SPIN: How would you do that?

Zappa: Income tax should be done away with anyway because when it was established it was an emergency tax and was supposed to have an end to it. Just like the toll booths on the highway. Income tax is a racket. The one thing the income tax does to everybody who pays it is it pisses you off because you earned that money and now the government is taking it away from you. If you gotta pay a tax, pay a tax when you buy something, not because you worked.

What this really gives you access to, in terms of tax recoupment, is the underground economy because when a guy is making a covert buck the goal is to spend the covert buck and at the point where you spent the covert buck you are now being able to tax every one of those guys who has laundered the cash. They gotta buy a yacht someday, a house, they're gonna buy something.

SPIN: You're going to drive all of that Colombian drug money into foreign countries, like Canada.

Zappa: Let them do away with the income tax. The other thing is you would save a great deal of money on the personnel of the IRS itself. You still have to have somebody do administrative sales tax. I think you could do it with five percent of the labor force you have in the IRS. Naturally it would take an act of God to do away with state income taxes.

SPIN: Fantastic idea. Not easy. Lots of problems.

Zappa: Well here's the other thing, think about this. Suppose I told you, from tomorrow on, you pay no income tax, no federal income tax. You'd be happy. You'd suddenly realize that you had another couple thousand bucks in your pocket. And it doesn't go in the bank. You'd go out and spend it. And there'd be a spike in the economy that would just go boom! The Dow went to 3,004.42—what do you think happens the day after they know that there's going to be no more income tax?

What I would propose to do, is have a five-year plan where the sales tax would be at twelve to fourteen percent on certain products. I'd try to exempt necessary foodstuffs,

because that's where the poor get hurt. And I don't think that many Colombian drug dealers are buying that many cartons of milk and eggs and stuff. And so you're not really going to cripple the nation's economy by exempting that sort of thing. So for five years you keep that sales tax a little higher just to deal with the deficit. And at the point where the deficit is done away with, then you bring the sales tax down to a maintenance level. I think you can run a pretty good economy that way.

SPIN: Have you discussed this with economists?

Zappa: I discussed it with my accountant who used to work for the IRS in Washington, D.C. He was head of collections for the Baltimore- Washington, D.C., area. He loves it.

The idea is that this is a zero balloon campaign. You want balloons then blow your own balloons. And the goal is to run the cheapest campaign in political history. I can sit at home and do talk shows all over the country on radio and answer questions directly to people who might want to vote. And it would cost what? Nothing. I don't believe that you really have to spend fifty millions dollars or apply for matching funds from the federal government and then be forced to abide by all those rules in order to do it. Because if you're a nonpartisan candidate then what the fuck?

SPIN: Do you think you'd be appealing to mass America even with that platform?

Zappa: There's only one way to find out. I mean, if I lose, then so what?

SPIN: Do you think you'd make a difference if you won?

Zappa: Oh yeah. How could I make things any worse than they already are?

SPIN: The least that could happen is that a lot of consciousness could be raised.

Zappa: Well, here's the least that could happen. You know what the other guys are going to say before they say it. And television is an entertainment medium. Now, you don't know what I'm going to say. Now you're in the middle of an election year and it's real dull. Do you think they would send someone over to talk to me every once in a while just to liven things up a bit?

I'm not going to debate these guys. As far as I'm concerned, they don't exist. Why should I sit there and talk over their bullshit. These guys want to sit there and riddle you with statistics. And what do you know? You're watching a debate at home and you're like, "Oh yeah. He knew a lot of numbers." Total horseshit.

SPIN: How do you define yourself as a musician? I was listening to on the way over here, *The Best Band You Never Heard in Your Life*. I heard part Spike Jones, part Kurt Weill, part Mahavishnu Orchestra—many things.

Zappa: The thing I do is build things. And I have to participate in their manifestation. That's why I had to become a band leader and a guitar player. I would have been happy to just write it and turn it over to someone else. But they don't play it if you give it to them. I learned that when I first started to compose it.

SPIN: Are you also a satirist?

Zappa: Yes. I'm a composer-slash-sociologist.

SPIN: My last question comes from a 23-year-old waitress in Malibu: Are you happy?

Zappa: Today, yes. Tomorrow, I don't know. Yesterday, so-so. I go day by day. If you're looking for an average, maybe not. Because you can convince yourself that you're happy because of where you live and what you own, but if you watch TV and watch the news, it's hard to convince yourself that you're happy because of what's going on. I spend most of my free time watching the news. I'm addicted to it. If I'm not watching the news broadcasts then I'm watching the raw footage on C- Span. And it pisses me off.