

## THE RONDO HATTON REPORT VOL XII

SEPTEMBER 21, 2012

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This our *twelfth* issue now makes up a round dozen, marking a cycle of **three years** since our organ first exposed itself to the world. ***Not bad, not bad***, though we do say so ourselves. Whether *lurker, shirker or smirker*, we hope y'all have enjoyed the show. This edition continues to bring you *poetry* and **polemic** from the usual suspects and more, ranging from a heartfelt plea for digital **insertionism** to another fine opportunity to *ruin your life*, dispensing essential **insights** into the counting of tuples along the way. And lest ye forget: this is an open *trans-continental* platform for the riding of **hobby horses**, mechanical or otherwise. Bring yours to the races, why *don'chya*?

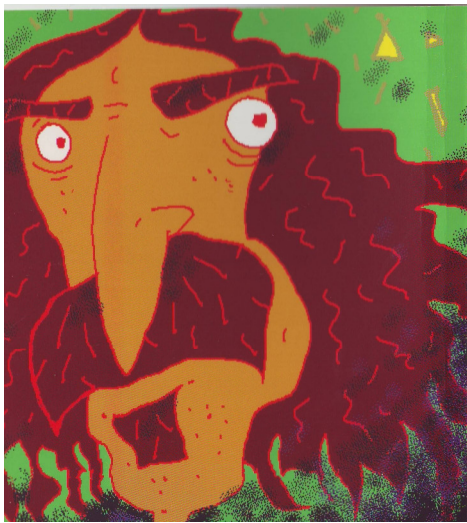
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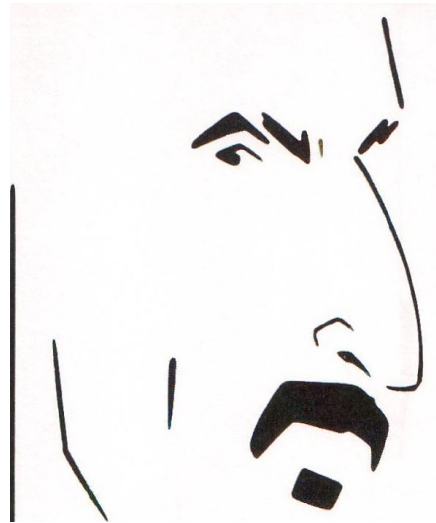
## 1. LINGUA FRANKA PART VIII: An Office With A Foyer

Arjun von Caemmerer

Elvis may have left the building but it is Frank Zappa who has infiltrated the establishment. From each sidewall of my consulting room, off-centre and central, Zappa looks in, witness to the vagaries of each doctor-patient interaction. What's a man like him doing in a place like this?



Nothing.

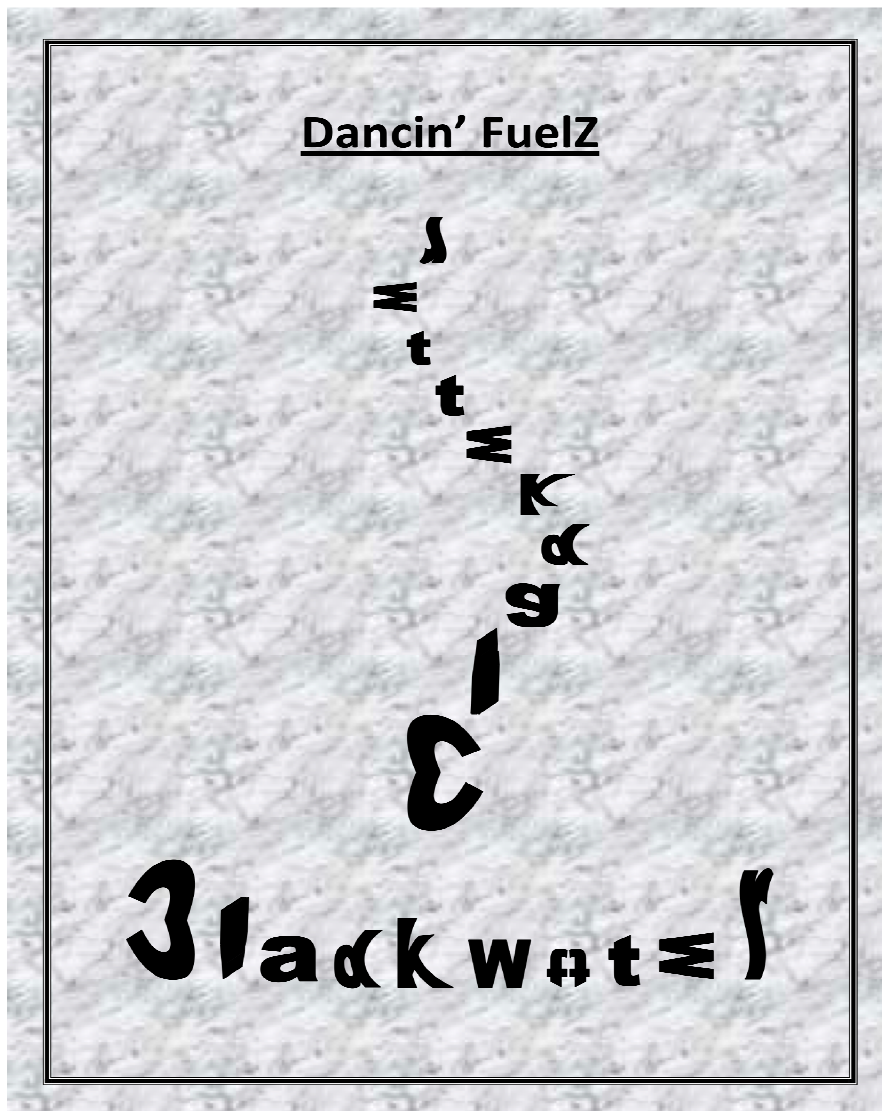


And everything:

***It is far more important to know what person the disease has  
than what disease the person has.*** Hippocrates

Of immediate appeal—particularly, I've discovered, to children—is Gabor Csupo's drawing from **The Lost Episodes**—which depicts Anthropologist Zappa: non-judgemental but wary, an inquisitorial Zappa alert to the Cosmos at large, his eyeballs wide, and beneath frazzled, electric hair, his Big Ears open. He reminds me to listen to the patient. And to listen with an open mind. The opposing wall's **Broadway the Hardway** Zappa, issued with a **Fair Warning**, inescapably holds, in his sharp, angular and severe glint, not only those necessary and constant reminders—No Falsifications; No Laziness—but also that, in the midst of consulting, Humour belongs.

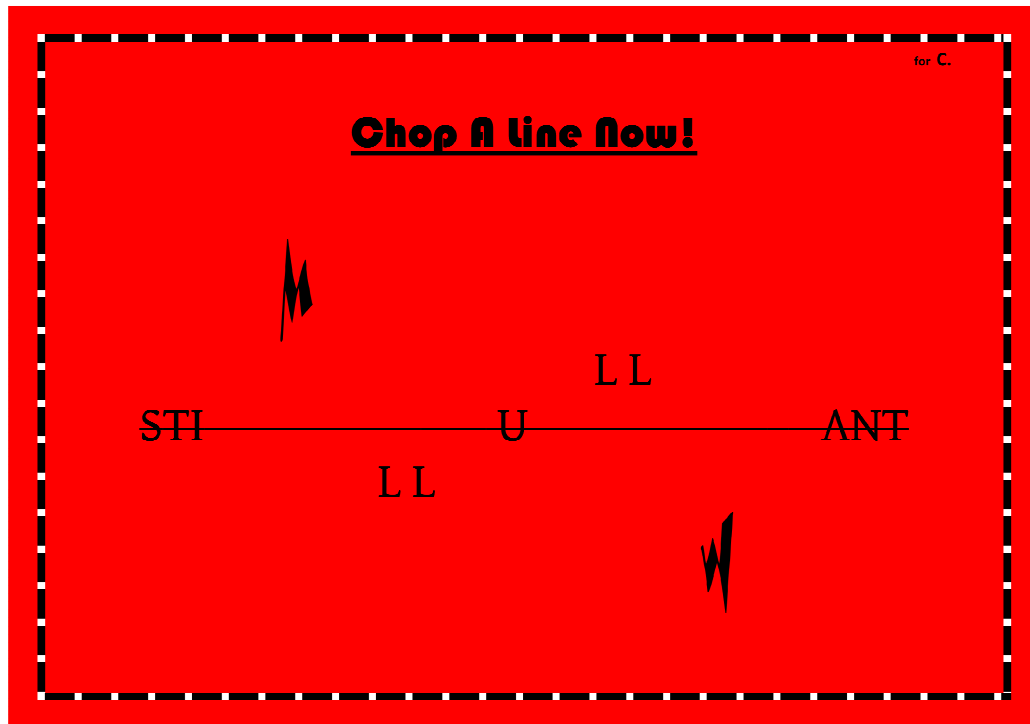
***Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.*** (Hippocrates)



Zappa throws down the gauntlet, declaring tobacco a food. Lest he be accused of hypocrisy for his avowed anti-drugs stance whilst swilling coffee and immoderately enjoying his favourite vegetable, consider the following: tobacco and cigarettes sharpened his creativity, giving life to our lives (listen to ***After Dinner Smoker***); he never used them as a “*special license to be an asshole*”; he never played victim (*the coffee made me do it*); and he was aware of (and outspoken about) the hypocrisies in the ‘war on drugs’ and the opportunism of the religio-moralistic masquerade of Prohibition. It seems to me that his objections to drugs, whether legal or not, were primarily about their capacity to impair clarity, creativity, autonomy (including financial), and

self-awareness. Zappa could not possibly have been unaware of the science linking tobacco to illness, but Immortality is not on the menu, and my guess is that having weighed the odds, he happily chose to pay the price.

Be wary of *Cocaine Decisions*



(Especially from a *Wino Man*)



*Extreme remedies are very appropriate for extreme diseases.* Hippocrates

fo' JAMA-People

## **Heimlich ManOuevre**

**Open Wide. say *Ahhh*  
(if you can)**

**Gutter All Speech**

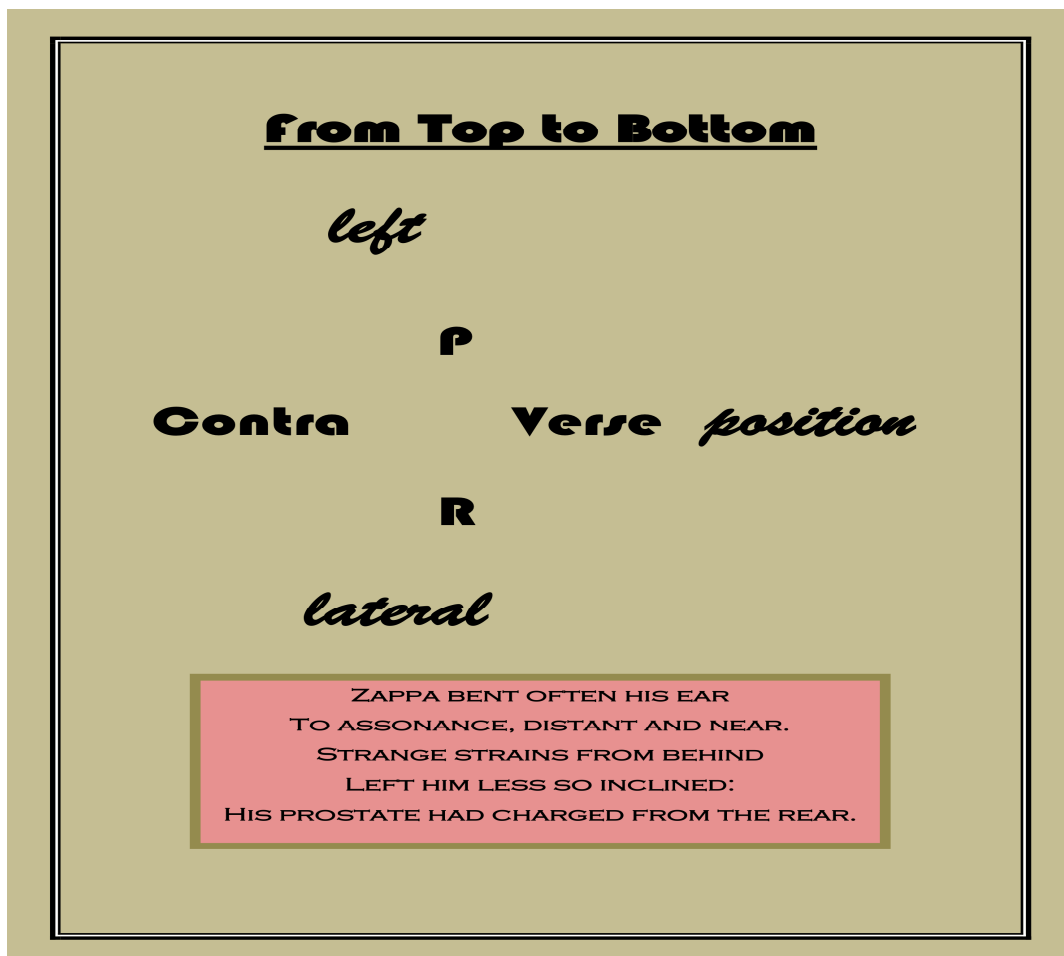
**Easy Does It  
(Easy Come. Easy Go)**

**Not a time for platitudes  
I would have thought!**

**As the good Dr Burroughs urged:  
*Beat It With Your Fist!***

***Declare the past, diagnose the present, foretell the future.*** Hippocrates

Zappa's medical influence here extends beyond the fringe of audience comprehension and moves into the direct realm of audience participation. Confirming the medical adage that *If you don't put your finger in it, you risk putting your foot in it*, Zappa died in his early fifties from metastatic prostate cancer. Everyone's Loss. And what makes this so **glove-smellingly shameful** was that this outcome was probably avoidable had an earlier, more accurate diagnosis been made. I now never dismiss out-of-hand the possibility that a male in his forties might have prostate cancer, because there IS some way to delay that trouble coming every day: with symptoms even remotely suggestive of prostate trouble—***Why Does It Hurt When I Pee?***—I recommend a rectal examination (digital and analog) and biochemical tests. *No not now? Maybe later?* Yes, you might be undignified. And maybe you will cry. *But what's the difference now?*



## 2. THE POVERTY OF COMPLETISM

Mimi Gabin-Khan

Another FZ re-issue? Surely not. We've got the vinyl, we've got the original CDs, we've got the FZ-issued remastered CDs of the vinyls, we've got the re-issues of those, and now digital re-issues of the original vinyls? How much of a completist do you have to be?

Trouble is, there's no such thing as a partial completist. You either is or you ain't. There is such a thing as a broke completist, however. So in the spirit of "I'll get there eventually", I took out a loan and bought three of the new re-issues just to see how long I could make myself wait for the rest.

And how was it? I went for Hot Rats, Burnt Weenie, and Fillmore East. There are (to my ears) minor glitches on each of them that I wanted 'fixed'. And they have been. Or at least, we get back to what was originally on the vinyl. First of all, Hot Rats. Unless it's just me, there's a 'problem' with the FZ remastered CD right from the first note (after the drum roll). What's that extraneous fourth note doing there rumbling below the exuberant opening fanfare of Peaches? It takes the edge right off the brightness and lowers the tone of what follows. Seriously. Listen again if you don't know what I'm talking about. It injects a Dio-Fa like dirge, a dirty ooze that pulls against everything else. Well, FZ must have known what he was doing, and maybe it was there all along, hidden beneath the sonic sludge of the vinyl. But I can't hear it on the record, and it just sounds like sabotage to me. So it's a joy to hear the CD of the analog 'original' which 'restores' the pristine unsullied brightness (or is it dullness?) of Peaches. Now I can listen to it again. I'd gone right off it ever since. And who can be bothered to haul out a turntable, especially when your precious records are so worn and you don't want to scratch them more than they already are, or worry about whether the track is going to jump?

Then there's the title track. What the @&\$% is that extra measure doing there right after Beefheart sings the first chorus (0.23-0.26 to be precise)? Was it a

joke? It just ain't right. Puts you right off your breakfast, yet again. I've argued this with friends in the past in situations where we couldn't actually compare the original with the CD (not having a turntable to hand) but this nails it. The analog CD doesn't have the extra measure. Through the magic of digital playback you can listen to them side to side and it jumps right out at you. I mean, I'm cool with FZ having stripped off the backing tracks to the initial violin intro (though it's nice to have them back again) but why the extra measure? It throws the whole thing out, and not in a nice way. It's another reason I stopped listening to the CD. And though I can live with the extra guitar parts, I still think that the original version reveals more of the brilliance of his editing skills and the reason why he excised the parts he did, even if it was space constraints that led him to do so.

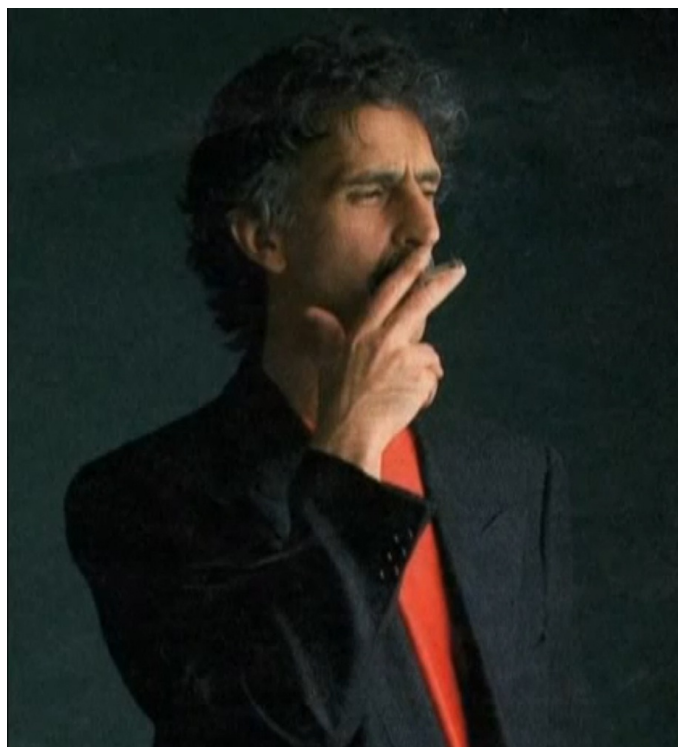
Next up, *Burnt Weenie Sandwich*. I love this album and its cheesy lo-fi vibe so much I can even bear to listen to it in mp3 format, so there's not much to be gained here. Except for one thing, and that thing is huge. There's a tiny missing micro-moment that has been driving me mad on the CD for years. It's right at the beginning of that beautiful piano intro to *Little House I Used To Live In*. Why/how on earth could FZ have dropped that poignant pause on the third note of the piece? It sounds like someone spliced it badly, and maybe that's what happened, the master tape was damaged and couldn't be rescued. OK, so it's only a micro-second. But I hate it so much I had to learn to play the piece myself – and believe me, that's not easy. I know he once said "I'm actually flattered that people are listening that closely to the albums, but what's disturbing me is that they're listening to the production more than the music." But with FZ's music, every little detail matters.

With *Fillmore East*, a close comparison on a good system makes it much clearer why FZ himself raved about the remastered version he put out, claiming the difference between the two was 'almost science-fiction'. There's no doubt that the analog original is quite muddy, and the stereo placement is definitely a bit off. The digitally tweezed version has much more clarity and conveys a better sense that you are actually there in the audience. But. But.



How could he ever have left out the Willie The Pimp Pt II solo from the CD version? FZ claimed he dumped it from the edit because “The two parts were not from the same performance so there would have been a tempo discrepancy right in the middle of a guitar solo.” But that was hardly an insuperable problem, even way back when in the 1980’s. The second part of the solo may be an entirely different beast, intensely visceral, snarling and scalding its way through the brief minute in ways unlike almost anything he’d played up to then, setting new standards for the abuse of the instrument. But that’s all the more reason to have it in there. Not to have it is a crime.

So it’s a mixed bag. Overall, I prefer the cleaner sound of the remastered CDs. I like music to be as present as it can possibly be, with all the instruments audible and separate. That is the heart of the matter, after all. And partly why classical music, with its insistence on antiquated ‘ambient’ recording techniques, still sounds so unattractive on record. Just another area where FZ was ahead of the game, and still is. Even his live recordings sound better than most other artists’ studio productions. But for some things only the original will do. If you’re happy to keep spinning your ever-more-worn-out vinyls, all well and good. But if not, I’m afraid you’ll soon be shelling out again...



### 3. WATERMELON IN EASTER HEY

Madge Immaney

Watermelon in Easter Hay is a puzzle. It doesn't sound like a Zappa solo. There is no other solo, not even Black Napkins, that matches its egregious 'keening'. It's the only solo where he starts to sound (god forbid) like Eric Clapton or countless other intensive-care weedy-wee guitar-hero types. And that is precisely why, presumably, it is often quoted as being people's favourite Zappa solo – unlike his other unlistenable, 'self-indulgent' crap, not to mention all that puerile sex-obsessed stuff.

So the question is, why?

It's a cheesoid snacklet with the cheese on the outside, like Burnt Weeny Sandwich, and countless other tunes where Zappa suckers you down the floral path before running out from behind a tree and braining you with a jagged briar. Remember the context in Joe's Garage. This is not Zappa playing, it's Joe. Joe Shmoe, the schmuck from the garage band who played stuff that sounded good to him. It's the last imaginary solo of a naïve guy with not very much imagination who got into a lot of trouble when the real world came up and smacked him in the face.

The other solos on the album are all FZ Plays FZ – harsh, demonic melodies that would bug most people (except the ones that get it). But this is FZ Plays Joe Shmoe, the sort of stuff that someone with a limited imagination would find appealing, sad, sentimental, self-indulgent pap. Until you get to the half-way mark, that is. Suddenly the tone goes into overdrive and Zappa is brutally bludgeoning the melody with a sharp stick, utterly trashing the nauseatingly trite tropes that have gone before. It's the same every time you hear the solo on every occasion he plays it. He's setting you up for a fall. And in fact if you look carefully at the only video I have been able to find of him playing it (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9DqykUsqRY>), you can see it in his face – there's a sneer (at 0.50) as he sets up the ponderously overblown blousy

Santana-esque tones of the melody. On the audio version in Paris <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6svzy9dVzt0> you can even hear it as he slides that bass note off the scale at 2.15 (it's a pity that there's a jump cut in the edit here which confuses things slightly as you don't get the start of 'his' solo), and the extra irony of the velvet slush echo in the accompaniment.

And anyway, what about the title? Watermelon in Easter Hay? Zappa may have chosen some pretty strange names, but he was never random. If you think about it for a moment, it's hardly a positive endorsement. What is a watermelon? It's one of the most greedy, water-intensive fruits you can ever hope to grow. What is Easter Hay? It's the driedest-up, least juicy form of hay you can hope to find. Now either he's referring to the idea of a watermelon sitting in a bunch of Easter hay like some oversized Easter egg, or he's commenting on two things which never belong together in the first place. Fortunately there's a quote in an interview with Frank in Guitar World of March 1982 which throws light on the situation. He says: "If a drummer overplays, if the bass player overplays or the keyboard overplays...if they don't have any sensitivity to what I'm doing or if they aren't smart enough to track the direction that I am going in, it's like dragging an anchor. In fact, I'll point out the way that song, "Watermelon in Easter Hay, got its name. It's from the statement that playing a solo with this band is like trying to grow a watermelon in Easter hay. And most of the bands that I've had, it was like that."

Growing a watermelon in Easter hay? That's an impossibility, right? So right there you see the scorn implicit in the title. You can see example of what he means from the later releases of 'original' live solos that he had earlier released with a new backing track that did them justice (Toad-O-Line, Keep It Greasey).

So the song is basically saying – this is all you can expect with a bunch of mediocre guys who don't have the imagination to cut it. On the other hand, what I'd really like to do is tear it to shreds, like this... but then it's only an imaginary excursion anyway so... well... never mind.

The family claims that it was one of the songs he was most proud of. Given their track record, it's hard to know whether you can really believe that. Or whether he actually did say that no one should be allowed to play it but him. That doesn't sound right either, or make a whole lot of sense.

The whole thing stinks. But there's no need to swallow the bullshit whole.



Wanna play too? Here you go:

<http://drawception.com/viewgame/DqSrGRdKas/watermelon-in-easter-hay/>

Enjoy now before the ZFT makes it illegal. Oh, the irony...

#### **4. ZAPPA SURVIVOR**

Scott Schroen

In the year 2002 I had been a professional musician for nearly 18 years and I was looking for a musical situation I could really sink my teeth into, so I placed an ad to start a Frank Zappa cover band. FZ was the only music I could think of that encompassed most every genre and style, sometimes even in the same song. I had not been a confirmed fan of FZ at that time but I knew enough about it to know that it would take some pretty good musicians to really make it work and it would be a challenge and something new for me. My real intention in placing the ad was to bring out the good musicians from the area and get the FZ band idea started and then maybe after some time I could work my way in and possibly even a steady gig! The response to the ad was 32 people with various instruments, ideas, motivations and abilities but they all had one thing in common that I noticed I did not have and that was a deep knowledge and love for FZ music and the positive effect it had on all of their lives. As I was also up to audition, I suddenly felt that being a good musician might not be the most important thing here, so I decided that if I really wanted to be involved in a scenario that I created, I had a lot of work to do.

The auditions were organized by having groups of 4 - 6 people 'band up' and just jam it out and after some time the next group and then everybody that was there that day got to vote for who would be back the next week, it was later dubbed ' Zappa Survivor'. After 3 weeks there were only 6 people left, 4 guitar players and 2 singers and by week 4 it was down to 1 singer, 1 guitar player that also played bass, 1 guitar player that played drums in high school and me, another guitar player. We became Uncle Meat and after 6 months of rigorous rehearsals we played the first show in Detroit, MI and it was simply amazing.

During the first year and a half with Uncle Meat it was so much fun because it was the same 4 people the whole time and we were all learning everything together and working as a team to do the best we could as a quartet. We were

FZ light = easier songs (Cosmik Debris, Camarillo Brillo, Muffin Man etc)

Stunt songs = not too easy, not too hard (Honey DYWAMLM, San Berdino, etc)

FZ heavy = difficult to play (Marquesons Chicken, What's New in Baltimore)

*'listen to it, write it down'*



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usually had the original album copy on vinyl, cassette tape and CD. I felt like I had entered into a whole new world and knew that I had to have very high standards for myself and the band to keep the integrity and the intention of the person who wrote the music, i.e. "Musician = the tool of the composer"... The band was validated after the first show and that just increased the work load for the band until after 18 months everybody was burned out, used up, tired, done... except for me, and after about 3 months the band reformed as

## UGLY RADIO REBELLION

Now that it has been 10 years and over 200 shows I can look back and have a very unique perspective on some things FZ. I have realized for a long time how fortunate I am to have been able to experience all of this and the musical knowledge that I've gained but mostly all the really cool people I have met along the way.

Of the 200+ shows we have done, at least 50 were with longtime FZ frontman and guitarist Ike Willis (Thingfish – Joe). There have been countless overnight drives where Ike and I would talk about most anything and whenever we would talk about FZ music he would always start out by saying, "This is what Frank told me." Of all the wisdom given from those talks the one thing that applies to everything is this;

*Take care of every beat – if you can do that you can play anything well.*

Most every song has a 'statistical density' to it that always leaves more to do in a 3 or 4 piece band and so arose the 'no idle pinky' policy meaning to use everything you have available to make some noise. Sometimes I would be playing lower range chords with higher range harmony and singing a horn line or playing a regular guitar part and singing multiple overlapping vocal lines. I kept very close attention to FZisms or things that were similar or the same from song to song. The first obvious thing that makes FZ music seem 'weird' is the use of odd numbers. 4/4 meter is by far the most common followed by

3/4 , which is an odd number of course but once you hit 5 it starts getting 'weird'

## FZisms

*Rhythm hits on the odd number of an odd number*

For five, 1 2 3 4 5 = hit on 1 3 5, sounds like dun dun da/dun dun da

For seven, 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 = hit on 1 3 5 7, sounds like dun dun dun da/dun dun dun da



This works for any odd number and could be broken up or subdivided in infinite ways.

## Examples

555 = 5/8, 5/8, 5/4 = accent on 1 3 5 for 2 bars of 5/8 and quarter notes for a bar of 5/4



Catholic Girl = 9/8, 9/8, 7/8, 7/8 repeat 3 times and add 2 bars of 11/16 then repeat that as a section.

Didja Get Any Onya = instant fast 5/16

Of course the scope of this article barely begins to scratch the surface of the musical content and complexities of FZ music and I would actually categorize some of it into its own genre. And then there is the lyrical side of Frank Zappa music which is a whole other universe. Ike said that for a lot of odd things it



was just the way he talked and later we would figure out it was a bar of 5/8 and a bar of 3/16 or whatever, it was rarely intentional. Filled with humor, political and social satire FZ lyrics should just be printed into a book called “FZ Lyrics”. The analysis is pretty obvious for most things. I mean, I think we all get pretty much the same thing from the lyrical meaning of ‘Crew Slut’ or ‘Ms Pinky’, but it is all still relevant today and I imagine Zappa will be one of the main musicians from this era to be remembered as a historical figure of our time.

FZ music and URR kick my ass everyday. It is a situation where you can get old and still be cool, so my plan is to do this forever!

Stay Tuned for Part II



## 5. WHEN COMPOSERS DECOMPOSE

Larry Teshmow

I was on holiday with my family once in Orvieto, Italy. My wife was browsing in a boutique, and I was just chillin' in the street, minding my own business. Hey, I have to have a holiday too. Suddenly my eldest son came running out shouting "Dad, they've got a Zappa poster in there!" (I'd trained him to keep me well informed). I followed him back into the shop to investigate, and indeed they had. It was a poster advertising a festival of Zappa music that weekend in Saturnalia, a local town. Right next to it was a poster advertising another event, a Mozart festival scheduled for a few weeks later. Those were the only two posters in the shop.

It was pretty astonishing. I mean, I'm used to thinking of Zappa as being part of the pantheon of the greats, but it's not that often that you run into people who agree with you. I had to be sure I wasn't just a coincidence, a random pairing. The owner wasn't there, so I asked the woman working there if she could call him. When he came on the phone, I asked him why he had the two posters side by side on his wall. His answer was something like "Where you bin livin', Remulak? Don't you have ears? These are the two greatest composers that ever lived!"

Somewhat of an exaggeration, perhaps. But at least he understood Zappa's position in the musical universe, and it would have been churlish to argue the matter. I thanked him for his understanding, and promised to make it to the Zappa festival, which turned out to be a charming affair held in the ruins of a mediaeval castle with an enthusiastic bunch of local bands and clots of dancing children. I expect it was much more fun than the Mozart festival.

But there's still somehow something alien about the idea of Zappa being recognised one day as the great composer that all of us reading this journal know him to be. It's as if there's something antithetical to the idea in the very fabric of his work, a resolute determination not to take himself seriously in that

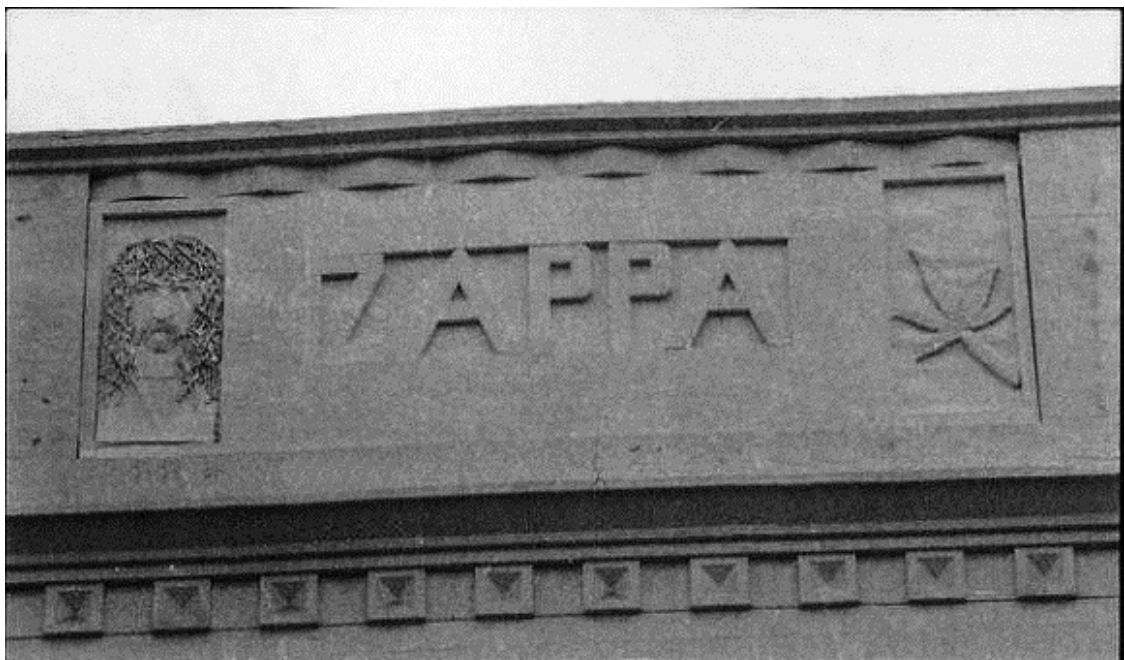
way (although to be fair, Mozart probably didn't either – it's usually the followers who cause the problem...) You can't really imagine his name carved in stone in some musical equivalent of Mt Rushmore. Or can you?

There was a story back in June about a graduation speech given at Pomona College by Cameron Munter, the then US Ambassador to Pakistan, which described a famous prank which attempted to do just that. The incident related in his speech (which you can find online here: <http://www.pomona.edu/events/commencement/2012/munter-speech.aspx>) tells how a bunch of students – one can only assume Munter was among them – decided to substitute the name ZAPPA for one of the dead composers' names commemorated above the entrance to the Bridges Auditorium where Zappa and Beefheart were scheduled to play on their 1975 tour, covering it over for the day with a Styrofoam moulding.



Given the choice of Wagner, Chopin, Beethoven, Bach and Schubert, I'd have thought Wagner would have been the obvious one to cover up, but there's no accounting for taste and for some reason they decided to choose Chopin.

History does not (yet) record what Zappa had to say about the matter, but fortunately a photographer was there to record the occasion for posterity.



No doubt Uncle Frank would have been less than impressed with the choice of weed as a representative symbol of his work, but back in the day many still assumed that he must have been one of the biggest stoners to walk the face of the planet, and we probably shouldn't hold it against them. At least they got his name up in Styrofoam, which somehow seems a much more suitable material than granite or limestone for the man who gave us *Cheepnis*. And as someone who spent most of his career putting the 'ass' in class, I'm sure he appreciated the gesture.

By the way, Munter's speech is worth listening to. If nothing else, it shows you the kind of trouble you can get into if you listen to Zappa. But it's also a useful comment on why Zappa believed, despite everything, that America was the greatest country in the world. After all (and it has to be said that there is a lot of that "all") it's still the only one founded for a principle rather than a prince. It also neatly illustrates why Zappa was so supportive of the Velvet Revolution, and why he is so revered there. And why, when the time comes that you can even take your clothes off when you dance, it's Zappa's music we'll be dancing to, and he won't need to have his name carved in stone. Composers may eventually have to decompose, but their compositions (and ideas) live on in the minds of those who love their music.

*Postscript:* Shortly after I wrote this, it was announced that Cameron Munter had resigned his post as ambassador to Pakistan, allegedly in protest against the number of drone attacks being launched by the US against "terrorists" in Pakistan, which as ambassador he was being increasingly pressured to authorize, and becoming increasingly reluctant to do so. Again, we see the spirit of Zappa music causing Big Trouble! Long may it continue to do so...

## 6. ZAPPA: Hegel, or, Not Again (Again)

Ben Watson

In *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807, §486) Hegel says that Enlightenment upsets Religion by bringing into the "*the household of Faith*" the "*tools and utensils of this world*". Suddenly I understood Captain Beefheart and Frank Zappa and their dadaistic play with vacuum cleaners and vegetables and other household objects – not to mention the cosmic floating sofa on the cover of *One Size Fits All*. I mean, I'd always liked these 'bizarre' aspects of Beefheart and Zappa, and found them funny and somehow 'correct'. Now I knew why: by using household items to destroy the otherworldly romanticism of commercial pop, they were staging their own budget Enlightenment!

But this Freak Enlightenment has a dialectic, it's arrived at through invention, spontaneity and play. It's not the imposition of a single law, of a rationality emanating from a single source, like light from the sun or a Gold Standard for national currencies. It doesn't destroy the fun, or reduce variety to a monotone. Quite the opposite, in fact. For commercial reasons, Zappa ended up centering his production on himself, using his own face and moustache as a logo. Nevertheless, his oeuvre is a mesh of other people, dehusked from inhibition by the zappological process, thrown into extreme states, whisked into unheard omelettes. Of all these dehusked people the most crucial was Captain Beefheart. As teenagers, Beefheart and Zappa listened to black R&B together. They decided R&B was a blueprint, a plan, a manifesto for total social transformation: a merging of life and art so vital and compulsive, it made the claims of the high-art avantgarde to "*supersede the gap between life and art*" look pale and unreal. Beefheart and Zappa emerged from a common experience, a common response to R&B, but the beauty of their relationship was based on a knowing antagonism. They competed with each other and in the early 70s dissed each other in interviews, but they were working out two poles of a single dialectic.

Zappa loved to shock music-press interviewers by talking about his devotion

to 'duty' and 'work', taboo concepts for the flower-power mindset. Beefheart argued the opposite. His creative impulse sprang from 'play', not work. Beefheart and Zappa disagreed about work and play, love and marketing, time and song-length – everything. On *Unconditionally Guaranteed* in 1972, Beefheart sang:

*She said, Baby, how long is your song?  
I said, Baby, as long as you want it to be*

On *Overnite Sensation* in 1973, as if replying, Ricky Lancelotti sang:

*I have take your time  
I have sung you my song  
Ain't no great revelation  
But it wasn't too long*

Lancelotti opens 'Fifty-Fifty' with:

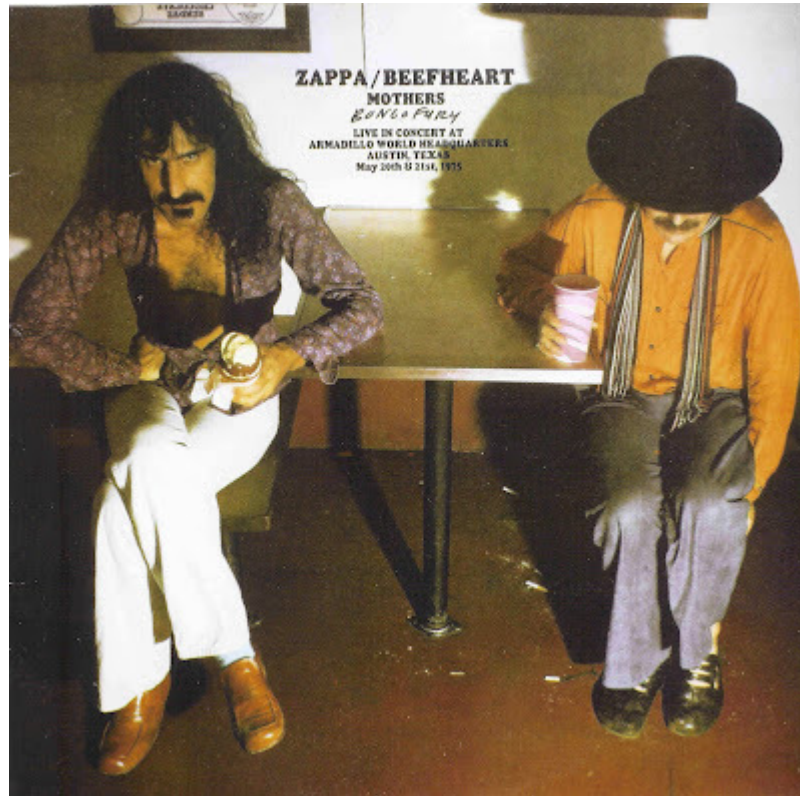
*Ain't gonna sing you no love song*

whereas Beefheart's track was actually named 'Happy Love Song'.

Having bad-mouthed each other in the music press throughout 1974, a sound commercial ploy for attracting attention, Beefheart and Zappa went on tour together and cut an album: *Bongo Fury*, which Vaclav Havel told Zappa was his "*favourite*". Havel's enthusiasm contrasts with *Bongo Fury*'s reception in America and England: *Rolling Stone* and *New Musical Express* panned it. It wasn't as good as *Trout Mask Replica*, the pair had run out of steam, the record was boring and self-indulgent. Actually, the opposing personalities of Beefheart and Zappa created a vortex: *Bongo Fury* is a lesson in the dialectical unity of opposites. Captain Beefheart's beat-poet sincerity and abjection run in the opposite direction to Zappa's control-freak cartoonery. This crash-course of opposites also occurs on the LP cover. At first, the cover



image looks quite straightforward, especially in comparison to the elaborate artwork Cal Schenkel concocted for *One Size Fits All*. *Bongo Fury*'s cover shows a snapshot of Zappa and Beefheart in a sordid diner, evoking the sorry picture of America outlined in '200 Years Old'. But look again.



In the German release of *Bongo Fury*, the cover photo wasn't cropped quite so closely along the upper edge as it was in other countries. We can therefore read some words printed on a mirror on the wall of the diner: "*chocolate sundae*". But they are reversed, in 'mirror'. The cover used a reverse-print of the photographic negative - what we call a 'flip horizontal' in image processing. I showed a copy of *Bongo Fury* to Simon Prentis, who visited Zappa regularly in his last ten years. "*Anything strange about this photo?*" I asked. He stared at it. "*Is the photo reversed?*" he asked, "*Frank's face doesn't look quite right*".

If the photo hadn't been reversed, Beefheart would have been on the left and Zappa on the right. He would have been the 'first' figure you looked at, assuming you read a picture like Latin alphabetic text, left to write. So it's as if Zappa had the transparency reversed in order to place himself before his rival.



If you look at the cover of *We're Only In It for the Money*, you'll see that when re-enacting the innerfold band photograph of Sgt. Pepper, Zappa placed himself far left. This means he's not actually on the cover, he's on the back. Since Jimmy Carl Black was the only Mother with a 'Zappa moustache' on the cover which faces you in a record shop, many new fans assumed he was Zappa. But when it comes to listing the Mothers in the sleeve notes ('left to right'), Zappa's position on the far left means he's listed first.



On the cover of *Bongo Fury*, switching left and right means Zappa, right-handed, is holding his ice cream in his left hand whereas Beefheart, who had been holding his drink in his left hand, is now holding it with his right. Beefheart's face is hidden beneath his hat brim, and he casts a shadow on the wall; Zappa is staring straight at the camera. Zappa is the sun, Beefheart is the moon. A purely single-source, solar Enlightenment is not enough; the Dialectic of Enlightenment requires reflected light, a moon. Once you see that the negative transparency was reversed, you twirl the photo around a central axis in your mind; the pair are now whirled together, dark and light in a single vortex. This is how their opposite yet complimentary arts should be conceived. The real world as a confabulation of direct and reflected light, which it is.

So, to Hegel, who more than anyone in the western tradition took seriously the dark/light lore of Oriental philosophy. Frank Zappa – and James Joyce before him – are fundamentally Catholic artists, recognising reality as social before it is individual; but they are also rebel Catholics, in other words they established new churches, towering edifices of technocratic artstuff from which to view the

clash of ignorant armies in the easy valleys of preconception. After all, the Catholic/Protestant difference on society and individual is really just a matter of emphasis, articulating contradictions in the capitalist order, which is proved by the fact that they have become competing explanations of identical societies. Hegel, on the other hand, is neither Catholic or Protestant, Christian or Buddhist: his recovery of the dialectic allows him to explain stuff, even to Zappa fans.

Near the beginning of the shorter *Logic* Hegel wrote in 1830 as an introduction to his *Encyclopedia* (§12), Hegel says *"thinking is always the negation of what we have immediately before us.* With Zappa, I encounter dialectical statements anyone can understand: not by 'dumbing down' philosophical concepts, but by rending the very materials of mass culture, so that they speak awkward and scandalous truths. Mass media have ensured that we live in a tissue of mediations: it's the duty of a properly political art – oh fuck that, I mean any decent response! – to tear into this tissue, and give us a sober view of ourselves and our relations to our kind. When Hegel talks of denying what is immediately in front of us, he was talking of a relatively unmediated world of tables and chairs and carts and horses, in which the arrival of a newspaper was perhaps a wonderful thing. Now, we are forced to live in a newspaper world, moulded by ideological experts. You can't lift a carrot and sniff it to see if it's worth eating, you must read the packaging's claims about organic and ethical farming, learn about some celebrity's decision to 'create' a range of pickled onions. Visit a supermarket, and your head reels: as Captain Beefheart used to say, *You've had too much to think.*

Zappa fights back the thought police by making us look at what's immediately in front of us. *"Where do you get all the great ideas for his songs?"* asked an especially inane TV interviewer. *"From the autocue, where you get them,"* Zappa replied, answering her question by exposing what was immediately in front of them. Zappa's 'bizarre' song titles do not drop down from some groovy surreal heaven, they stem by noticing what's immediately in front of us: 'Crush All Boxes', 'While You Were Out', 'Poofters Froth, Wyoming' - these signs

were all out there in the mundane world. We only realised how bizarre and suggestive they were after Zappa cut these phrases out of everyday reality and framed them in pop songs.

(This have been an edited version of a text originally declaimed in person at this year's *Yellow Snow Festival*, Finland)

