

BY BILL HOLMES

As a longtime fan of both The Mothers of Invention and Frank Zappa's post-Mothers efforts, I've read and listened to just about everything available...and then some. Despite that familiarity, I was thoroughly entertained by this documentary and pleased to see that the childhood years could be presented quickly without sinking into the abyss of trivia that so many bio programs dawdle in. After a very quick set-up, we're quickly on to the teenage bands, the early friendship with Captain Beefheart, the Studio Z era and the Soul Giants...the latter a blueprint for the Mothers and the first indication that Frank was going to be a control freak.

The DVD is divided into fifteen chapters, chronologically following Zappa's career from those early points through the dissolution of the original band. Although in full screen mode and 2.0 sound, the quality of both was more than sufficient. The story flows well with good use of archival material; several chapters are titled as and cover specific album releases between 1966 and 1969 (from *Freak Out* through *Uncle Meat*). These historical vignettes are brought to life through interviews with Bunk Gardner, Don Preston, Art Tripp and especially the late Jimmy Carl Black, who simultaneously exudes both great pride and bitter heartbreak when discussing these forty year old memories. Black is *mesmerizing*; I could have listened to him for hours.

Other featured contributors include Kim Fowley, Zappa biographer Ben Watson, Alan Clayson (musician and biographer of Edgar Varese, Zappa's early idol) and music journo Ritchie Unterberger, who shows up on so many music documentary DVDs these days, one would think his presence was a legal requirement. By and large their input is interesting and informative, although each has a distilled point of view honed from a position far different than the band members who lived in the trenches. Where the writers tend to pontificate, the musicians are straightforward and blunt, warts and all. As you'd expect, this film is not authorized by The Estate of Frank Zappa.

Besides Black, the MVP of this production is writer Billy James, whose book *Necessity Is - The Early Years of Frank Zappa and the Mothers of*



[DJ Dusk's Root Down
Soundclash / DJ Dusk](#)

02/12/2009

Jan 09



[Rio The Definitive
Authorized Story of the
Album / Duran Duran](#)

01/29/2009



[Season 2, Vol. 1 + Season 2
- Staying The Courses /
Sarah Silverman Program + Bush](#)

01/27/2009



[Live from Austin, TX
Ãçâ, -â, ç78 / Merle](#)

Haggard

01/21/2009



[Live from Austin TX
Ãçâ, -Ëœ84 / Waylon](#)

Jennings

01/16/2009



[Christmas On Mars /
Flaming Lips](#)

01/13/2009



[What We Do Is Secret /
Germes](#)

01/07/2009

Dec 08



[Live from Austin, Texas /
Widespread Panic](#)

12/24/2008



[Punk Rock Karaoke / Punk
Rock Karaoke](#)

12/18/2008



[The Best of Season 3 /
Smothers Brothers Comedy](#)

Hour

12/10/2008



[A Colbert Christmas: The
Greatest Gift Of All /
Stephen Colbert](#)

12/05/2008



[Live At The Astoria /
Groundhogs](#)

12/03/2008

Nov 08



[Wild Combination: A
Portrait of Arthur Russell /
Arthur Russell](#)

11/24/2008



[The Mothership Connection](#)

Invention (2000) is probably the definitive tome on the early band. In that book, James' access and anecdotal input from Preston, Gardner, Black and other original Mothers gave a rare glimpse into the least documented era of Zappa's career. To a person, the comments from the band members illuminated both the pride that they had in their accomplishments and the eventual frustration they felt when a collaborative exercise in madness became the tightly controlled vision of one (albeit supremely talented) visionary. Seeing James interviewed alongside most of the same subjects in this program only underscores how good his book is (a worthy companion to this DVD, and recommended).

The early years were obviously fun and stressful - financially and creatively - and the stories detail the long rehearsals, drug intolerance and the divide between those who could read music and those who couldn't. Ray Collins and Roy Estrada are fondly spoken of, and there is a palpable camaraderie between the Mothers. There's even a healthy respect for Zappa despite the sudden and bitter ending to the group, which none of the interviewees feel was the right move even forty years later. As Black says at the conclusion of the program, *"I had a lot of fun with those guys...it was nice feeling to play in the best band in the world in the '60s...and I'll always think that we were the best band in the world. Nobody will ever convince me otherwise."*

As soon as the film ended, I had three immediate thoughts:

1. I need to play all my Mothers albums right now, and loud.
2. Damn, I wish this movie had been six hours longer.
3. Damn, I wish there was another DVD about the *next* few years.

What all the contributors do agree upon is that the synergy and originality of the Mothers was never recaptured in later incarnations of Zappa's bands, no matter how technically proficient the musicians were. Sadly the film only includes scattered short clips instead of full performances; had this DVD included a set from the Garrick Theatre in 1967, it would be a home run. But it's still highly recommended to anyone exactly as is, and it's simply indispensable for a Zappa/Mothers fan.

[Live 1976 / Parliament](#)

[Funkadelic](#)

11/06/2008



[All Together Now /](#)

[Beatles/Cirque De Soleil](#)

11/04/2008

Oct 08



[Lou Reed's Berlin / Lou](#)

[Reed](#)

10/31/2008



[There's Always Be](#)

[An England / Sex Pistols](#)

10/22/2008



[Live at Montreux / Tori](#)

[Amos](#)

10/16/2008



[Awake My Soul: The Story](#)

[of the Sacred Harp / Matt &](#)

[Erica Hinton](#)

10/14/2008

Sep 08



[Kraftwerk and the](#)

[Electronic Revolution: A](#)

[Documentary Film /](#)

[Kraftwerk](#)

09/30/2008



[Silver Jew / Silver Jews](#)

09/18/2008



[Live at Babeville / Ani](#)

[DiFranco](#)

09/16/2008

Aug 08



[Live From Austin TX /](#)

[Norah Jones](#)

08/29/2008



[Jack in the Green: Live In](#)

[Germany / Jethro Tull](#)

08/25/2008



[Ladies And Gentlemen, The](#)

[Fabulous Stains / Fabulous](#)

[Stains](#)

08/11/2008



[You Think You Really](#)

[Know Me: The Gary Wilson](#)

[Story / Gary Wilson](#)

08/01/2008

Jul 08



[Live From the Streets of](#)

[New York / Willie Nile](#)

07/21/2008

Special Features: Extended interviews with the contributors, contributor biographies. BILL HOLMES



 [Love Story / Love](#)

07/03/2008



[You Think You Really Know Me: The Gary Wilson Story](#)

[Wilson Story / Gary Wilson](#)

07/02/2008

Jun 08



[Tendrils: A Video Document by Mia Ferm / Castanets](#)

06/24/2008



[Return of the Living Dead Boys: Halloween Night 1986 / Dead Boys](#)

06/20/2008



[Busted Circuits And Ringing Ears / Tad](#)

06/16/2008



[The Thrill Of It All: A Visual History \(1972-1982\) / Roxy Music](#)

06/10/2008



[Ultimate Reality / Dan Deacon](#)

06/09/2008



[Air Guitar Nation / Air Guitar Nation](#)

06/09/2008



[Fuzz: The Sound That Revolutionized The World /](#)

[Fuzz: The Sound That Revolutionized The World](#)

06/09/2008



[Back In History: Live 1980 / Inmates](#)

06/09/2008



[Wetlands Preserved: The Story Of An Activist Rock Club /](#)

[Wetlands Preserved: The Story Of An Activist Rock Club](#)

06/09/2008

Blurt Poll

Disclosure time, kids. We don't wanna shave your buzz, but Uncle Blurt needs to know your favorite form of natural high.

- Natural Light
- Natural® brand condoms
- Banana peels
- Aversion therapy
- Powdered Smarties
- Poverty
- Peruvian marching yogurt
- Sucking Freon from a balloon
- Cannabis fertilized by the feces of field drones, er, Nepalese monks
- Sticking your finger in a light socket

- Licking morning dew from a lily
- Getting a Pop Rocks enema
- Gerbiling
- A bidet rinse
- Repeating the same steps and expecting a different result

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