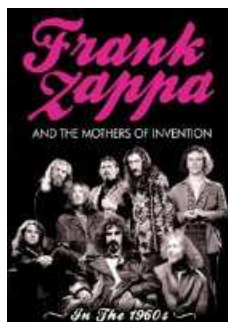




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## Frank Zappa & The Mother of Invention In the 1960s



**Director:** Various (UK, 2008)

**Studio:** MVD

**Aspect Ratio:** 4:3 Fullscreen

**Region:** 0

**Running Time:** 134 minutes

Review posted on 10/04/2009 by The Graveyard Tramp

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### REVIEW:

"It was a nice feeling to play in the best band in the world in the Sixties, and I'll always think that we were the best band in the world. Nobody will ever convince me otherwise."—Mothers drummer Jimmy Carl Black

While I have a few of his albums in my collection (*We're Only in it For the Money*, *200 Motels*, *Tinseltown Rebellion*), I have never been a huge fan of Frank Zappa, finding the man's life and history to be far more interesting and entertaining than most of the music that he produced over his incredibly prolific three decade career in the business. Having always had something of an anthropological interest in the counter-culture movement of the 1960s, it is this period of Zappa's creativity that I find most fascinating, and this extensive documentary covers those years in a very satisfactory manner, at least to the casual fan like myself.

As its title suggests, *Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention in the 1960s* focuses on the formation and development of Zappa's first important band, and details the recording and influence of their first six LPs – *Freak Out!* (1966), *Absolutely Free*, *We're Only in It for the Money* (both 1967), *Lumpy Gravy*, *Cruising with Ruben & the Jets* (both 1968), and *Uncle Meat* (1969). While Zappa may have developed in technical proficiency in the years following the break-up of the Mothers of Invention (initially simply called the Mothers until their name was elongated at the insistence of a nervous record label), he was arguably never able to improve upon the ideas and creativity which he exhibited in these early groundbreaking recordings.

**"An exhaustive overview of Zappa's career throughout the sixties, and should appeal to both hardcore fans as well as the casual viewer"**

While the cover blurb states that the film is "Not authorised by the estate or family of Frank Zappa", it differentiates itself from similar made-for-DVD documentaries in that the producers have actually gone out of their way to license a lot of the original music from the albums in discussion, rather than simply rely on a parade of talking heads espousing their views on songs we may not even be familiar with, or would need to recall from distant memory. Additionally, the film also features a lot of rare archival footage, including clips of the band performing live in the UK and Germany (where the band were threatened with violence when Zappa refused to vocally support the underground activist group *The Weathermen*), and a great clip of a pre-Mothers (and short haired) Zappa playing a bicycle (!) on the *Steve Allen Show*.

With Zappa himself no longer with us (he died of prostate cancer in 1993), we unfortunately don't get to hear what he retrospectively thinks about this period of his career. However, we do get to hear from a number of original Mothers members, including Bunk Gardner, Art Tripp, Don Preston and the late Jimmy Carl Black, all of whom share some fascinating anecdotes about the formation of the band and the

recording of the LPs, and it's interesting to hear the stories told from varying perspectives. And it's a positive that the filmmakers allow Zappa to be often cast in an unfavourable light, particularly when the band members discuss the management of the Mothers, and the sudden and rather casual manner in which Zappa informed them that they were no longer on the payroll, after he decided to go it alone in 1970. Other interviewees on the DVD include legendary underground music figure Kim Fowley, biographer Billy James, and Zappa academic Richie Unterberger. The inclusion of music from other artists such as the Jefferson Airplane and the Fugs also helps to create an awareness of the musical climate in which the Mothers operated in.

At over two hours in length, this is an exhaustive overview of Zappa's career throughout the sixties, and should appeal to both hardcore fans as well as the casual viewer who has any affinity for the music or social and creative climate of that much celebrated (and equally much maligned) decade.

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**SPECIAL FEATURES:**

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- Extended Interviews
- Contributor Biographies

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**RECOMMENDED VIEWING:**

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- [200 Motels](#)
- [Baby Snakes](#)
- [Uncle Meat](#)

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