



Though neither *Frank Zappa And The Mothers Of Invention In The 1960s* nor *Kraftwerk And The Electronic Revolution* (both from Sexy Intellectual) bears the “Under Review” tag, both documentaries follow the same basic format as that music-doc series. Both take whatever legally defensible footage they can swipe of their subjects (from TV appearances, promotional films, and the like) and string them together with thoughtful cultural/historical analysis from some of the ugliest music critics the producers could find. They’re also both way too long, leaving no recording or biographical tidbit unexamined. Still, it’s instructive to watch the two docs back-to-back, and enjoy the contrasts and the organic progression between the artists. *Frank Zappa And The Mothers Of Invention In The 1960s* covers Zappa’s early high-school goof-offs with Don Vliet (later to become Captain Beefheart), and gets into his days pumping out ersatz teen-pop for exploitation movies, as well as his public debut as a kind of tongue-in-cheek performance artist. By the end of the decade, even though Zappa remained as conceptual and smart-ass-y as ever, critics had begun to note the musicianship on the Mothers records, and to admire the satirical ideology behind all the potty jokes. *Kraftwerk And The Electronic Revolution* sort of picks up where the Zappa doc leaves off. In the early days of German underground rock, the rigid structuralism and freeform excursions weren’t too far removed from what Zappa was up to at the time, though as the ’70s progressed, krautrock—and Kraftwerk in particular—become more focused and curtailed. The critics interviewed on *The Electronic Revolution* are a feisty lot, skewering British technopop acts like Gary Numan and Soft Cell for ripping off Kraftwerk while adding personality, which sort of missed the point of Kraftwerk’s anonymous utilitarianism. The critics also put Kraftwerk into proper context, explaining how the shifting tides of internationalism conspired to forge a uniquely European sound, with no basis in R&B or any other trace of the kind of “corrupting” American influence that Zappa embraced. **Both: B+**

- [Noel Murray](#)