

CityBeat

Although *The Freak-Out List* is attributed to **Frank Zappa**, the new DVD is less by Zappa and more about him. The documentary's title is also its theme, a reference to the extensive roll call of avowed influences that Zappa declared on the inside of the gatefold of his debut with the Mothers of Invention, 1966's *Freak Out*. *The Freak-Out List* examines Zappa's love of a wide variety of seemingly disparate musical styles (Modern Classical, Doo Wop, R&B and Jazz), all filtered through his Rock sensibility and steered by his aspiration to be taken seriously as a composer of contemporary Classical music.

The Freak-Out List illuminates Zappa's most prevalent influences and the manner in which he wove them seamlessly together — the atonalities of Schoenberg, the multi-key explorations of Stravinsky and the visionary musique concrete experimentalism of Zappa's most potent Classical influence, Edgard Varese, who also provided Zappa with the quote that he trumpeted throughout his career ("The modern day composer refuses to die").

In addition to contemporary Classical revolutionaries, Zappa was also totally enamored of Doo Wop and R&B. The early Mothers albums always had some obvious Doo Wop references (he even crafted an entire album's worth and credited it to Ruben & the Jets), and he often cited Johnny "Guitar" Watson and his hit "Three Hours Past Midnight" as having the most impact on his personal musical style. The documentary also looks at Zappa's prescient blending of Jazz and Rock on 1969's *Hot Rats*, a full year before Miles Davis' acclaimed Fusion classic, *Bitches Brew*.

The Freak-Out List is populated with a variety of interesting interview subject (including former Mothers Ian Underwood, Don Preston and George Duke) and several Zappa biographers (including Ben Watson, who makes the astute observation that Zappa didn't see the genres that he loved as compartmentalized factions of music, but simply as music).

There are some marvelous clips here: Zappa and the Mothers in their earliest incarnations, Zappa conducting studio musicians for a performance of Varese's "Ionisation," presumably from the still unreleased *Rage and the Fury* album. There isn't any footage of Zappa discussing his own music, as those clearances might have been too expensive or unavailable, but *The Freak-Out List* is still an amazing glimpse into one of the greatest musical minds of the 20th century.

- Brian Baker