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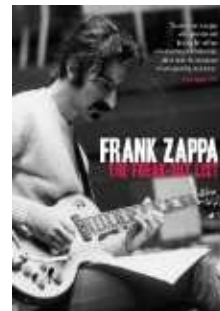
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Review by [Ryan Keefer](#) | posted March 25, 2010 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

The Movie:

Admittedly I'm a little late to the hubbub surrounding Frank Zappa; it's hard to jump in with both feet to his music, but his autobiography "The Real Frank Zappa Book" remains the most entertaining and worthwhile reads for any entertainment figure I've come across. I go back to it sometimes, similar to what I would do for a movie or album. Yet as time goes by, fewer and fewer musicians and composers are advocates for one of the more artistic influences in the last half century.

Thankfully for some acts, the work of musician/composer Frank Zappa's still remains influential almost two decades after his death, Next year will have been 45 years since the release of his debut record with his band the Mothers of Invention. Titled "Freak Out!" it featured an eclectic mix of influences unlike anyone had seen before or since, with its experimental nature reflecting in some conceptual albums released since that time. Among the liner notes in "Freak Out!" is a list of individuals and groups that helped shape the album's voice. It's those notes that make for the inspiration of *The Freak Out List*.



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Among the people listed within the abovementioned list are recognizable names like Joan Baez, Bob Dylan attorney Melvin Belli, painter Salvador Dali, bluesmen Willie Dixon and Buddy Guy, along with the obligatory family members and friends. What *The Freak Out List* does is examines a few of the names on the list and helps illuminate their influence on the album, with clips of their music interspersed with interviews from rock journalists, music historians and occasionally, some of the musicians. The parties include two members of the doo-wop group The Cadillacs, along with a couple of the Mothers (Ian Underwood, Don Preston and George Duke). The documentary, which was initially produced for British audiences, explains the impact that the artists had on Zappa's music, and provide biographical information on the artists covered in the piece.

The intention of the piece is good; I've always been curious about what makes a musician's mind tick and what gets their creative juices flowing. And I've always been one who has been fascinated by an eclectic taste in music, so to see these tastes of Zappa's musical style for the "Freak Out!" album are interesting and fun to watch. But I think the gap between experiencing the music and sitting through some of the interviews is a little too deep for the feature to cross.

Then there's the whole matter of the feature itself; at almost 90 minutes, for the novice Zappa fan, it feels as long as listening to one of his albums. Not that it's not any good, but the interviewees just don't have a lot of passion or revelatory information in them that make the feature worth jumping up and down about. The fact that this feature was made without the cooperation of the Zappa estate shows that it either wasn't the feature they wanted, or that fans probably wouldn't get that big of a kick from it, despite its appeal to a small niche of admirers.

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And that, in and of itself, may be a redeeming quality about *The Freak Out List*. While it's not biographical or informative, it is about the music, that which helped shape Zappa's musical stylings. That should be celebrated, even peripherally as this disc seems to do.

The Disc:

Video:

Full-frame video, whoop de do. The piece has a variety of archived studio and performance footage of Zappa, filmed interview segments with the cooperating band members and journalists, and some interesting anonymous footage to play against the songs that served as influences for the album, and it's juggled decently, with no edge enhancement or other work done to the transfer. It's average, albeit unspectacular viewing.

Audio:

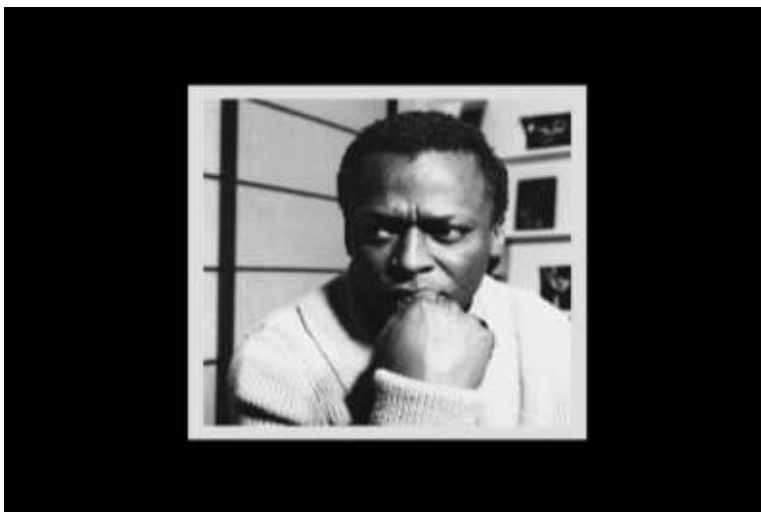
Two-channel Dolby stereo sound. Considering the amount of music in this pseudo-music documentary, the music sounds hollow and front-heavy, with virtually no replication in the rears, or a hint of subwoofer activity to boot. The interviewees sound fine and the volume levels are decent, but the additional reason to enjoy this disc is the music, and we barely get here, if at all.

Extras:

A less than five minute piece entitled "Desert Island Discs," which covers some of the essential Zappa-influenced music to try out, along with biographical information on the interviewees.

Final Thoughts:

If you're looking for a biography on Frank Zappa, *The Freak-Out List* isn't it, but it is a little entertaining to see the music that Zappa dug and helped play a part in his own music. For fans of music or that of Zappa, it's worth checking out.



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