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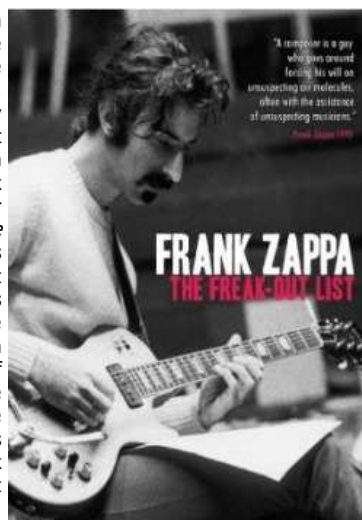
Frank Zappa: The Freak Out List

Score: **86%**
Rating: **Not Rated**
Publisher: **Chrome Dreams**
Region: **A**
Media: **DVD/1**
Running Time: **88 Mins.**
Genre: **Documentary/Live Performance/Musical**
Audio: **Stereo Sound**

Features:

Special featurette: 'Frank Zappa's Record Collection'
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Frank Zappa: The Freak Out List is like a film version of someone's graduate thesis, but we mean that in the best possible way. If you've ever tried reading someone's graduate thesis, you know they aren't exactly light reading. They usually come down to mining some obscure point or theme, on the basis of trying to come up with some piece of original scholarship. **The Freak Out List** in the title is a reference to the liner notes from Zappa's first record with his band *The Mothers of Invention*, titled "Freak Out!" This actual list charted the bands influences at that time, which became known more and more as Zappa's primary influences. Mostly they were composers, musicians, and artists, both known and unknown. It was an interesting jumping off point for people that wanted to know more about Zappa, but let's be honest: This was the band's first album. What became a legacy was just beginning, and **Frank Zappa: The Freak Out List** proves to be a good look at the context for that list on Zappa's first album. This isn't a film to watch if you want to know about all Zappa's albums, his life, or his family. It isn't any kind of official documentary, as far as the Zappa Family Estate goes, but that doesn't prevent it from being important to Zappa's fans. The broader context for Zappa happens to also be a great survey of progressive music in the 20th Century, which is as good a category as you'll be likely to pin on Frank Zappa.



The broad outline of **Frank Zappa: The Freak Out List** is that it begins with a look at how Western Classical produced two very broad streams of progressive music in Stravinsky and Schoenberg, both stretching the limits of tonality and inspiring others like Webern and Varese. The latter composer becomes a major influence on Zappa, making an appearance on the **The Freak Out List**, and continuing to inspire Zappa later in his career. This point about idols becoming partners is brought up again in reference to Johnny "Guitar" Watson, among the section of the film that looks at blues and doo-wop influences on Zappa. I had totally not made the connection until it was mentioned here that one of the songs on an early album, "What's the Ugliest Part of Your Body," had a doo-wop feel to it. The connection between how Zappa intertwined rock and classical music is expanded in this section, as several musicians that played with him during the '70s expound on how he brought all his influences into the music, but also transcended them by simply trying to make the sounds he liked to hear. The doo-wop and blues influence was not a common one for rock musicians at the time, but it was the music that Zappa had grown up hearing; not even his musicians seemed sure whether it was played ironically or not, but his appreciation for Johnny "Guitar" Watson is expressed as something deep and meaningful to Zappa, to the point that it heavily influenced his own lead guitar style.

The final chapters of the film have to do with tracing the jazz influences in Zappa's music, and the extent to which Zappa was legitimized by groups like Ensemble Moderne or individuals like John McLaughlin recording his music. Zappa's collaboration with Boulez is touched on, but nothing is mentioned or shown from his period of experimentation on the Synclavier. There are some great segments showing musical performances from jazz greats Miles Davis and Eric Dolphy, along with clips showing dancing from a modern production of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" ballet. **Frank Zappa: The Freak Out List** has great editing and tells its story without losing focus on our area of interest, which is how all this comes



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back around to Frank Zappa. A lone special feature walk through some of the records that Zappa used to learn more about the music that inspired him. If you have the idea that Zappa was an imitator, it should be easily dispelled after watching this film. As much as many of the artists he channeled creatively were difficult to pigeonhole in their respective areas, Zappa's music remains difficult to penetrate. In one sense it is what it is, with a good beat, funny lyrics, and awesome musicianship. After watching **Frank Zappa: The Freak Out List**, you'll realize there are so many more layers than you previously imagined. The film rarely becomes academic, but throws just enough intellectual commentary out to remind us that in addition to being hugely talented and having wide-ranging musical interests, Zappa was one heck of a smart dude.

-Fridtjof, GameVortex Communications AKA Matt Paddock

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