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“Frank Zappa: The Freak-Out List”

As a total Frank Zappa freak (I discovered him in high school), I found this documentary endlessly fascinating.

On the inside cover of his first album, 1965's “Freak Out,” Zappa printed a list of his musical influences, men he looked to for inspiration.

This documentary examines how their ideas were appropriated and mutated by the idiosyncratic leader of the Mothers of Invention.

Most serious music lovers know Igor Stravinsky (“The Rite of Spring”), Karlheinz Stockhausen (a father of electronic music) and Arnold Schoenberg (proponent of nonmelodic 12-tone music). Zappa discovered their recordings while still a teen.

But his favorite was the esoteric Edgard Varese, a Frenchman who incorporated sirens and other bizarre sounds into his compositions. Varese also gave Zappa his war cry: “The present-day composer refuses to die!”

Though a pop music snob, Zappa had a soft spot for certain forms. A big chunk of this film is devoted to doo-wop music and to Chicago bluesman Guitar Junior, whose playing style deeply impressed Zappa.

All this could be dry and academic, but the documentary overflows with archival images, rare footage of Zappa in performance, interviews with former sidemen Ian Underwood and George Duke, plus an assortment of music scholars and Zappa enthusiasts.

By ROBERT W. BUTLER