

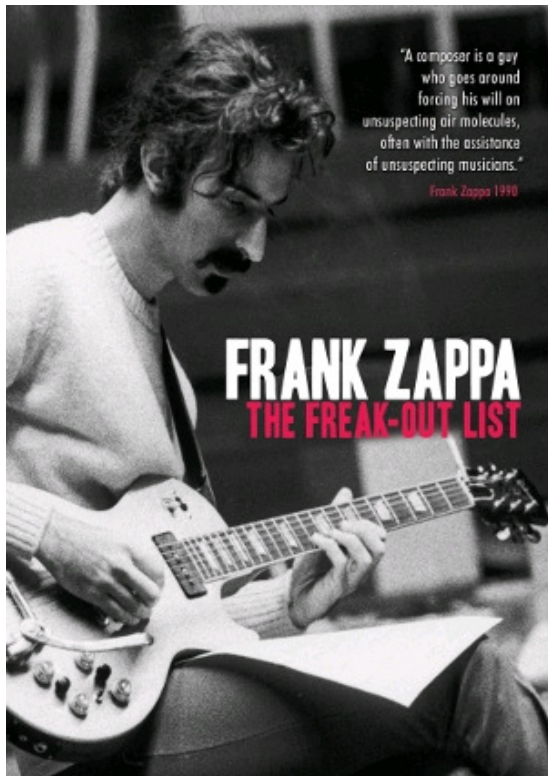
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THE GARY PIG GOLD REPORT, Vol. 27

FRANK ZAPPA'S LIST



Long before the Valley Girls, mud sharks, dental floss, yellow snow and, tragically, the cancer that claimed him in 1993, there was simply **Francis Vincent "Frank" Zappa**, a young kid with an above-eclectic record collection who escaped the confines of Lancaster, Calif., to arrive in Hollywood with his "rockin' teen combo," The Mothers of Invention, in 1965.

His career onstage and disc thereafter caused countless unsuspecting youngsters such as myself to immediately set aside their **Monkees** albums in order that we could join our newest mentor upon this most adventurous of all, as it turns out, musical paths.

But exactly how *did* this seemingly unassuming composer/guitarist become one of the most musically and socially iconoclastic participants of the 1960s? A fascinating new documentary from Sexy Intellectual, [Frank Zappa: The Freak-Out List](#), uses the 179 names [listed](#) within the original 1966 issue of the Mothers' debut album, *Freak Out!*, as a guide to explaining, well, *why* the music therein sounded the way it did.

As in, sounded like *nothing else* released that year -- or ever since, for that matter.

Its detailed examinations of the classical composers and rhythm 'n' blues musicians, who first awoke young Zappa to the possibilities of a life and career submerged in musical exploration, truly give this film the meat of its matter. Of course, the quote "The present day composer refuses to die!" will be familiar to anyone who read the fine print inside the Mothers' key early

albums. But as *The Freak-Out List* explains, the man who first uttered those defiant words in 1921, French composer **Edgard Varèse**, remained a major influence upon, and inspiration to, Zappa throughout his life.

Likewise, we learn of -- and actually hear via side-by-side audio/visual clips -- the above-obvious influence of **Arnold Schoenberg's** "Accompaniment to a Film Score" on Zappa's very own film scores, and precisely how snatches of Holst and Stravinsky end up weaved into the Mothers' *Absolutely Free* album of 1967. Why, as Zappa himself ordered the likely bemused readers of *Hit Parader* magazine that year, "buy everything that you can by **Igor Stravinsky** and dance to it."

Now, on the all-important flip side of *The Freak-Out List* lie the many doo-wop and R&B artists Zappa was also seriously grooving to, as he mastered drums then guitar in his very first Lancaster desert garage bands. For instance, it is impossible to hear *any* of Zappa's multitude guitar solos, recorded or otherwise, without being directed straight back to the magnificent **Johnny "Guitar" Watson**, and *The Freak-Out List* presents joyous, yet ultimately heartbreaking footage of the two's final musical get-together chez Zappa.

Elsewhere, we're shown how no less a kindred musical spirit as **Miles Davis**, and his *In a Silent Way* album in particular, helped create a context for Zappa's landmark "jazz-rock" (as it would be pigeon-holed today) *Hot Rats*. Yes, although he once (in)famously claimed "Jazz isn't dead; it just smells funny," Zappa obviously kept his fair share of **Eric Dolphy** records alongside the Varèse, and co-operated so fully -- and so successfully -- in jazz violinist **Jean-Luc Ponty's** *King Kong* project that Ponty ended up as an actual Mother himself for two entire tours.

So, then: Dozens of albums, hundreds of compositions and thousands of performances later, we still may not be able to get a sufficient grip around the art, or as some would say artifice, of Frank Zappa. But ever since leaving on what was called his final tour, on Dec. 4, 1993, all we have left are his dedicated scholars, followers and now films such as *The Freak-Out List* (plus Sexy Intellectual's companion DVD *Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention in the 1960s*) to guide us toward our understanding and appreciation of a figure so prolific, so public, yet so baffling.

Musician/writer Gary Pig Gold is the co-founder of the To M'Lou Music label.

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