

## FAME Review: From Straight to Bizarre: Zappa, Beefheart, Alice Cooper, and L.A.'s Lunatic Fringe (DVD)

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## From Straight to Bizarre: [Zappa](#), [Beefheart](#), [Alice Cooper](#), and L.A.'s Lunatic Fringe

*Sexy Intellectual - SIDVD568 (DVD)*

Available from [MVD Entertainment Group](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange  
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The Sexy Intellectual label continues its series of ground-level rock historiography with this badly needed insight into one of the most unusual and influential side alleys of the rock culture, the cosmology revolving around the genius Frank Zappa. However, never an imprint to indulge specious idolatry, the weird 60s L.A. sub-sub-sub-culture Zappa created—or rather, as the film makes explicit: invited into this house and life, oft to his regret—is shown warts and all...which only makes the documentary more and more compelling as the exceedingly gratifying 2-1/2 hours wend their way from the TV screen straight down into areas of the psyche you thought dead and buried. No such luck, Heironymous, they were only stunned and dormant, and now's the renaissance: it's gritty, it's exhumatory, and it's warped, but God almighty is it fascinating.

Hands down, Zappa was as important to rock and roll as the Beatles, but in a fashion far from linear and available for inspection only in retrospect. Not only can the shaggy and beak-beezered force of nature be stood up as one of America's great rebels literally in a line with Thomas Paine, Mark Twain, Lenny Bruce, and Bill Hicks, but he was all too humanly flawed and *Straight to Bizarre* begins setting the record aright. An incredible hypocrite looking down his nose at hippies and drugs while hopelessly addicted to the worst most destructive drug on planet Earth (nicotine), a blatantly errant moralizer (chasing anything in a skirt, even in front of wife Gail, while directly or indirectly criticizing such things in others), a little too often a heartless capitalist (advising Beefheart to screw his musicians and "take most of the money" from his recordings), Francis Vincent Zappa was nonetheless inarguably a phenomenon possessing a brain and character that came to impress untold millions around the globe. This DVD begins to look much more factually at it what swirled around him.

Along the way, you'll hear directly from Drumbo, the irrepressible Kim Fowley, Pamela Des Barres, and many others as well see Richie Unterbeger looking like a living Drew Friedman / Daniel Clowes caricature of a caricature, sounding like one as well, and all kinds of eccentrics. And there's scandal aplenty. I mean where else would you get the lowdown on dickhead Ian Underwood sabotaging Essra Mohawk (Sandy Hurvitz) every given chance, soon followed by Zappa himself when his and Hurvitz's side "romance" went sour upon Gail's pregnancy? Nowhere, friends, nowhere. Then there's the overdue microscope on Beefheart's stellar but highly problematic talent, Bill Harkleroad adding eerily to the soupcon. Didja know Van Vliet was highly influenced by Stockhausen, Olivieros, and Reich? Yep, he was, and once that's said, it's perfectly obvious...but not until. It's said here. Turns out, though, that the moonbrained madman was not all that dissimilar to Buddy Rich, tyrannizing his band psychologically and emotionally. Ironic, no?, that in an age of so-called freedom, the 60s, the Magic Band was really an aggregate of Stockholm Syndrome survivors. Guh-rooovv and far out, man!

Then there was Alice Cooper. While horribly screwing up the band's sound, Zappa soon, and this would repeat like clockwork, took a high-handed Republican disdain to their drug usage (the gents ironically turned onto a bomber by Grace Slick and the Jefferson Airplane during studio sessions), walked out, and left them to the mercies of—you guessed it—Underwood. The debut, *Pretties for You*, did okay regardless but was not even in the same dimension of what the later infamous lads would do once they escaped Zappa's "tutelage". Smith and Dunaway, however, make the point that can be said of all Zappa's proteges: without him, it's VERY likely they would never have made it to the big time, folded their tents, and gone home.

Ultimately, ironically, and perversely, *From Bizarre to Straight* strips away the commercial veneer erected even by Frank and is subversively factual, a demon's delight in a world of gushing fanboyisms. Straight from the mouths of those who were there, the real skinny lowdown is spilled all over the screen, and, by the time it's done, you've no doubt everything is true, from the chaoticism to the skulduggery to the landscape of surreally sublime genius hacking its way through a resistant milieu that would never arise again.

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