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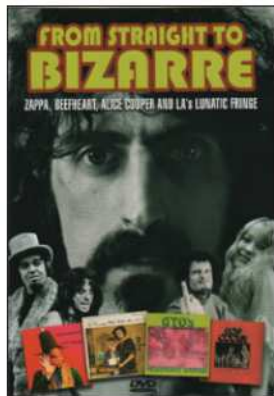
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From Straight to Bizarre - Zappa, Beefheart, Alice Cooper and LA's Lunatic Fringe

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by [Mario Calvitti](#)

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From Straight to Bizarre - Zappa, Beefheart, Alice Cooper and LA's Lunatic Fringe

Sexy Intellectual Prod
rating: 3.5 stars

Almost all DVD so far published by Sexy Intellectual proved to be very interesting and well made, addressing topics and characters in the history of Rock 60s and 70s according to a documentary featuring a format proved to be successful (interviews with musicians and journalists / music critics mixed with archive images). Although this DVD is no exception, dedicated to an aspect of Frank Zappa less known, that his activity as a producer

of other artists for the label Bizarre and Straight he founded (with his then manager, Herb Cohen).

The story of those two years between 1968 and 1970 and of the dozen published albums is told through interviews with three of the major biographers Zappa (Billy James, Ben Watson and Barry Miles) and some of the musicians directly involved, taken from the Magic Band Captain Beefheart, Alice Cooper group and the GTO, as well as Jeff Simmons. From their testimony emerges a portrait of a unique era and some downright quirky characters, whose work Zappa had somehow tried to document. Its eccentricity, more or less marked, is the common feature of the artists who have recorded for the two labels (the Bizarre was to be reserved for the most extreme, while the Straight were dedicated to the most 'normal' although the distinction soon lost meaning). Unfortunately, rarely the originality of its musical quality was accompanied by, and most of the artists soon fell back into the darkness from which it came, also because of the production of Zappa, who almost all discontent or because of his

excessive intervened when in the first person, or the exact opposite when other commitments - or very little - left the supervision of the production to someone else, usually his musician "handyman" trusted Ian Underwood. Indeed, it was difficult to manage Zappa in the same way and with the same dedication to the many commitments which already had occupied all his time, provided that the work as a composer and leader of the Mothers of Invention had their top priority.

Among the artists involved are from the folk musicians (Sandy Hurvitz, the pair Jerry Yester / Henske Judy, Tim Buckley), Rock (Alice Cooper and Easy Chair with Jeff Simmons), the Soul (Persuasion), monologisti cabaret or theater (Lenny Bruce and Lord Buckley, of which Zappa personally supervised the publication of the registration of some shows), but above the unclassifiable (Captain Beefheart, Wild Man Fischer, GTO). They above all to have established retrospectively the importance of the label with their works, even if only in the case of Beefheart we can talk about artistic merit. In 1969 it was released through Straight what is widely considered his masterpiece, and one of the most important records of all time, that *Trout Mask Replica* still capable of upsetting after more than 40 years, which would follow another good album, *Lick My Decals Off Baby*. A Beefheart did not like the production of Zappa, who instead of taking them in the recording studio had arranged directly in the house in which they lived and tried to capture its essence in a more authentic kind of anthropological documentary. This aspect is what characterizes the work of Wild Man Fischer (character with mental disorders taken literally from the road) and the GTO, or Girls Together Outrageously, a band groupie; extraordinary works from the point of view of social anthropology, but well thinness music and art.

Other names published, it is noted for its critical importance the contribution of Tim Buckley, author of two splendid albums for the

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Straight (*Blue Afternoon and Starsailor*), made without any involvement on the part of Zappa, and should perhaps be re-evaluated the two disks Jeff Simmons, who had impressed Zappa enough to become for a time bassist Mothers.

The commitment to Zappa, however, was excessive, particularly in view of the poor results, the "no commercial potential" was too much for him, but that he had done with a sort of proud Mothers flag staff, and the adventure ended soon, leaving deep traces (apart from the few exceptions mentioned). Of its protagonists, some would have continued his career without being able to repeat the results (Beefheart and Buckley), others have gained notoriety and success with other labels (Alice Cooper and Persuasions), most would just back from oblivion which were temporarily raised (Sandy Hurvitz, then ribattezzatasi Essra Mohawk, Jerry Yester and Judy Henske, Wild Man Fischer, GTO, Jeff Simmons).

The documentary, quite long (2 hours and 40 ') can make us relive that time unique and special, taking center stage freak of Los Angeles in the late '60s, through images, memories and testimonies of some of its protagonists. Much more than an oldies nostalgia, the

work is definitely worth attention, even if the practice not to include subtitles limits its use to those who have some familiarity with the English language.

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