

STOMP & STAMMER

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of human desire. Its space age bachelor pad swank is no cushion against deeper issues. The story is less about cyber-anxst than it is the evergreen puzzle of life as a dream-within-a-dream that philosophers have forever tried to solve. — Steve Dollar

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

[Sexy Intellectual]

Concerned with off-kilter dynamics that may or may not resonate with more than a few thousand ears, the challenge for independent record labels is to maintain a generous business sense that's fair to both the artists and the financial liquidity of the label so that more records can be released and promoted.

It's been said by those close to him that Frank Zappa didn't seem to like anything other than whatever it was that he was involved with, providing only sarcasm to outsiders. So it's easy to understand why he'd start a label to be in control of Mothers of Invention recordings. But besides Brian Eno, no other artist has been able to have things so much his own way — with his hands all over production of the records released, thus establishing a fine line of continuity running through each of them — other than Zappa.

It's unfortunate when the entire motivation for starting a record label is to latch onto "the next big thing." Zappa's motivation was to paint a portrait of his own influences, from beatnik poets to doo wop and the avant garde, so by the time he and his manager Herb Cohen started these labels, Zappa was well established as an eccentric, outside the mainstream, encircled by oddballs on the music scene like Timothy Carey and Burt Ward. His Straight label served as the offshoot from the range of strange, focusing on already established but still obscure acts like Tim Buckley and ex-Lovin' Spoonful member Jerry Yester and wife Judy Henske. Bizarre, on the other hand, was the flagship label dedicated to promoting Zappa and Beefheart and the jagged, spiritually chaotic roster that appealed to the emerging freakscene.



Formed around Captain Beefheart's quandary over Blue Thumb Records releasing his *Strictly Personal* album prematurely, in hindsight Beefheart complained that Cohen led things in the wrong direction. Yet *Trout Mask Replica*, arguably his masterpiece, came out on the new label! And while Larry "Wild Man" Fischer, a street poet and multitasking psychotic, has been extensively covered in his own recent documentary, It's interesting to note that Beefheart did not share Zappa's enthusiasm and resented having his music presented alongside Fischer's "songs."

This two-hour, 40-minute DVD focuses attention not only on the two heavyweights, but three smaller releases from the Bizarre/Straight labels: Sandy Hurvitz's debut record, the GTOs' *Permanent Damage*, and the first album from Alice Cooper, described as "a post-Altamont drag band."

Having met the Mothers during their brief New York stint at the Garrick Theater, Sandy Hurvitz claims Zappa lost interest in recording her and turned things over to Ian Underwood, who didn't know his way around a recording studio, so even though her record was Zappa's first venture it led to her changing her name to Essra Mohawk and writing songs that would be recorded by Cyndi Lauper and Janet

Jackson! Nice move, Zappa!

The Laurel Canyon Ballet Company evolved from Hollywood groupies and displaced Frisco scenesters painted like raccoons to become the GTOs, none of whom played instruments or had professional voices. Pamela Des Barres would write down her exploits in books, while it's rumored that Miss Merci's makeup and flamboyant manner of dress was co-opted by Alice Cooper. Their record was a flop but their impact ranks alongside

Yoko Ono and Iggy Pop on the impending punk movement several years later.

The soon-to-be Top 40 success story of Alice Cooper began with their recordings for Straight, 1969's *Pretties for You* and *Easy Action* the following year, neither of which truly captured what had attracted Zappa in the first place: the press had labeled them "the worst band in LA!" Zappa was more inclined to their live stage antics, and when the rumor spread that they'd bitten off the heads of chickens onstage, Zappa frantically urged them not to deny the claim.

The legacy of Bizarre/Straight is that it was the first time a record label was created to chronicle a time and a scene rather than seek out hitmakers, so in essence, Zappa's venture laid the building blocks for the late '70s grassroots movement that provided a platform for punk, where labels like Bomp!, Ork and Sire, and later on, Sympathy for the Record Industry and Sub Pop were established to give voice to bands that might otherwise have been dismissed by big record companies. ESP Disk had done much the same for the New York jazz scene. Zappa took the rejection he'd received from the major labels, who saw "no commercial potential" for his work, and turned it upside down.

—David T. Lindsay

40 watt club

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Tuesday, March 6th 8:30
J Roddy Walston & the Business
The Features
Kingston Spring

Wednesday, March 7th 7:00
Henry Rollins
"The Long March Tour"

Tuesday, March 20th 8:00
Neon Indian
Purity Ring

Saturday, March 24th 9:00
Radiolucent
Josh Roberts & the Hinges

Thursday, March 29th 8:00
Nic Cowan
The Brian Collins Band

Saturday, March 31st 8:00
The Naked & Famous
Vacationer

Monday, April 2nd 8:00
Kimya Dawson
Paleface
Your Heart Breaks

Thursday, March 5th 8:00
Real Estate
The Twerps

Thursday, April 19th 8:00
!!!
Shabazz Palaces

Saturday, May 5th 8:00
Coheed and Cambria
Moving Mountains
Pianos Become the Teeth

Saturday, May 12th 8:00
Beach House

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