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Eat That Question: Frank Zappa in His Own Words

By Unknown

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How does this camera look?

Is it nice?

Okay, how about this?

How about saying, "Hi, this is Frank Zappa.

"I guess... I... I guess you

don't have anything better

"to do tonight, huh?"

I mean, assuming that

they've flicked on the set

and they're sitting there, absorbing the rays.

"Well, you might as well sit back

and watch Take Off, then."

All of that?

Yeah.

You don't have to say

the stuff about the rays.

That's parenthetical.

Say it again?

Something like, "Hi, this is Frank Zappa.

"I guess you don't have

anything better to do tonight, huh?"

Yeah. Ready?

Hi.

This is Frank Zappa.

I guess you don't have anything

better to do tonight, huh?

That's why you're watching Take Off.

Huh?

Nothing better to do, huh?

Hello, we're talking with Frank Zappa,

a musician, filmmaker,

an independent thinker,

and a personal favorite of mine,

who's been in rock music

for almost two decades.

Well, I'm about to get sick

From watching my TV

Been checking out the news

Until my eyeballs fail to see...

Zappa is the leader of perhaps

the roughest and farthest-out group

in the scene today, the Mothers of Invention.

Is anybody's guess...

And ever since 1967,
he has left an explosive trail of music
that has had one constant throughout:
biting social commentary.
You're being victimized right now.
Do you know it?
That trouble coming every day
No way to delay that trouble
Coming every day...
You have a classical background.
That intrigues me. Are you doing...
Not really. I'm just... You know?
Frank Zappa is one of the most controversial
modern composers and musicians.
Zappa is perhaps most famous for a style
of musical satire
involving lavatorial expletives
and outrageous happenings.
Those are the same people who say,
"Yeah, he eats shit on stage
and steps on baby chickens."
The distorted mirror through which
we experience ourselves
and the neurotic, perverted
society that man has created.
On his street would take a turn...
The guy who sat on the toilet seat,
some kind of hairy monster from the '60s.
Well, let's face it, I sit on a toilet seat,
and so do you.
The only problem is that
somebody took my picture while I was there.
Every time I hear 'em
Sayin' that there's no way to delay
That trouble comin' every day...
Zappa is irreverent.
Some people think he is downright offensive.
What about this suggestion?
But I guarantee you this,
he absolutely will not bore you
and he very well may surprise you.
Well, hello.
Fuck the union.
Well, what does it all add up to?

What is Frank Zappa about?

Well, I don't think that anybody has ever seen the real Frank Zappa, because being interviewed is one of the most abnormal things that you can do to somebody else. It's two steps removed from the Inquisition. All right. Are you rolling?

- Yep.

- What?

You okay? We can start? Okay.

It seems that the business thing is usually the thing that drags most artists down, but I hear you're quite a great businessman. Well, how have you managed to survive so long?

Well, it is just a matter...

It's a matter of survival more than success.

I have survived for 17 years.

Successfully? Survived?

I'm still in the business, that's something.

Are you happy?

Sure. I love what I'm doing.

I have the best job in the world.

If you had to define your job, how would you define it?

I'm an entertainer.

Pure and simple.

Right.

Do you think the kind of entertainment that people are craving now is much different than it was when you first emerged?

No. I don't think so.

There's several different kinds of people who listen to what we do.

You can't please 'em all.

I mean, there are some people that only like the earliest albums, and they think they're really true fans, but actually they're just fucked, you know? They're just these snotty little people who don't really understand what's going on.

These are the people
who know everything they know
about me from Rolling Stone magazine.
People just crave those early albums
and don't know anything about
what we're doing today.
Does that upset you? Obviously, it's...
Well, I hate to see anybody
with a closed mind on any topic.
So, I just feel sorry
that they're missing out on a lot of good stuff
that's happened since 1967.
Your mothers and fathers
are all drinking beer...
Watching...
They're watching Roller Derby,
and then they change the channel.
And then they see you guys on the floor,
and they say, "Oh, boy, they're really sick."
I think I might be calling you something
that most of America wouldn't call you.
They'd look upon you as an exploiter.
Why an exploiter?
An exploiter of a... Of a... Of a revolution...
Someone hoping to sell tickets to a concert
on the basis of a social revolution.
Did we ever advertise
that we were going to promote a revolution,
display a revolution, discuss a revolution,
or have anything to do
with a revolution at a concert?
In many ways, you epitomize the revolution.
Well, that has nothing to do with the means
by which we advertise a concert.
We advertise that we're coming there to play.
The word gets around.
Plastic people
You gotta go
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah
Plastic people
You gotta go...
Hey, that sounds like shit.
Frank, a few questions
that we'd like to ask you this evening

come from high school students
in southeast Pennsylvania.

And the first question
that we'd like to ask you is,
how did you start out in the music business,
and how old were you
when you first got started?

Well, the first time I ever
got paid for playing music
was when I was 15.

And I started off as a drummer,
and before I actually had a drum set,
I used to play...

I was rehearsing with
this rhythm and blues band.

We used to rehearse over
at this preacher's house,
and since I didn't have any drums at all,
I had to borrow two pots from the kitchen,
and I used to put them
between my legs, like bongos,
and play on them with the drumsticks,
and that's how I started off.

I was reading about the first time
you ever composed a piece of music.

And I don't know if it was
really a piece of music,
but you actually went and you ruled out
the way it should look,
and you started drawing
the notes on the page...

That was a pretty great story.

- Well...

- What inspired you to do that?

I always thought music looked nice on paper,
and since I had a kind of interest in art
when I was a kid, I could draw pretty good.

I used to draw dollar bills
and things like that.

They were the wrong color,
so I couldn't pass 'em,
'cause all I had was pencils and white paper.

You know, I couldn't get the green right.

But...

I figured, well, if I could
just draw those things on the paper,
then you hand it to a musician,
and a musician knows how to read it,
and then he can play it, so that's what I did.

And then I started drawing music.

I hadn't the faintest idea
what it sounded like.

So the music came before the lyrics.

Yeah. I didn't write a rock-and-roll song
until I was about 21 or 22 years old.

Or any song with any lyrics to it.

And prior to that time,
the only thing that I was writing
was chamber music and orchestra music.

I started when I was 14.

You play a bicycle?

I... Yeah.

Are you in the musician's union?

No.

Do you play any other musical instrument?

Anything more conventional, perhaps.

Guitar, vibes, bass and drums.

How long have you
been playing bike, Frank?

About two weeks.

He probably was selling
insurance or something,
and he thought, "What's something real jerky
"that'll get me on The Steve Allen Show?"

Playing bicycle.

What could be sillier than that?

And he did it, and here we are.

That's probably how it happened.

You really only been playing two weeks?

Yes.

What do you do ordinarily, besides this?

I'm a composer.

Now, the whole idea that
we're going to do here
in this improvised concerto for two bicycles,
a pre-recorded tape,
and the musicians in the back,
is that you're supposed to

express yourself freely,
without any kind of...
You have to let your front down and...
All right.
Now, the tape is pre-recorded electric noises
that I stuck together.
But now the... The way we work this is,
when the man in the control booth
feels moved
to add his electronic part to our work here,
he will throw a little switch,
which just lets some of this noise through,
and then I requested the musicians that,
if they feel so moved,
make any noise possible on their instrument.
No... Try to refrain from musical tones.
And, in fact...
They won't have any trouble with that order.
Bravo!
I must say that I am always
in favor of enlarging the horizons,
at least in peering anxiously
beyond the horizons
of any field of human endeavor or interest,
and, therefore, I congratulate you
on your farsightedness.
And as for your music,
don't ever do it around here again.
Some people like to
be a carpenter, you know.
They're interested
in working with their hands,
or they... Or they're interested in electronics.
They like to solder wires together.
Or they're artists, or they're something.
That's their field of interest.
Unfortunately, I like to play music.
Now, when you want to play music
and you want to earn a living
from playing music,
you have to work under the conditions
that the environment imposes on you.
They don't make it easy
for you to be a musician.

They don't...

In the United States especially,
musicians are generally regarded as sort of
useless adjuncts to the society,
unless they do something creative like
write a Coca-Cola jingle,
and then they'll be accepted.

But musicians usually are regarded
as sort of the scum of the earth,
and so, if you want to be a musician,
you just have to realize before you start
that nobody is really gonna care.
Wait a minute. It's time to hype an album.
Okay, go ahead.

This particular project
has been very expensive.

This is our third album. Can you see it?
Have you got a picture of it,
so we can all see it?

It's called We're Only in It for the Money.

We are the other people

We are the other people

We are the other people

You're the other people, too

Found a way to get to you

Do you think that I'm crazy

Out of my mind?

Do you think that I creep in the night

And sleep in a phone booth?

Let me take a minute to tell you my plan

Let me take a minute and tell who I am

If it doesn't show, think you better know

I'm another person...

All of a sudden, your music is...

Is selling and making a lot of money.

You dig the bread?

I think that it's very pleasant,

but I'd like to see some of it.

You're not getting any of it?

Well, it seems to take a long time

getting there, you know?

Record companies have

a peculiar way of making sure

that your expenses always

exceed your profits.

It's very...

You know how they do that, don't you?

Yeah, I know how they do that.

And don't you get a feeling that now,
with your records moving up in the charts,
you're moving into
the establishment very much?

I don't know.

- I've been hearing that.

- Do I look like

I'm moving into

the establishment very much?

Before that, you never got your music
heard by anybody, isn't that correct?

- Absolutely true.

- Okay.

- Nobody cared.

- Nobody cared.

- And now...

- And they still don't care,

- but they pay for it.

- Right.

Well, you know who's buying
the albums, don't you?

Yes, I do.

I've examined my market rather thoroughly.

And who's buying it?

- That's none of your business.

- Okay.

But then, isn't it...

The minute you look at you,
don't you get a feeling
that you're part of the hippie establishment?

- Just because of the looks.

- Maybe.

I'm not talking about what
you say or do, or how you play.

You're very packaging oriented, aren't you?

Yeah. I think everybody is, to a degree.

That you look, when somebody
sees you for the first time,
as part of the hippie establishment.

- Or worse.

- Or worse, right?

Yes. Yeah.

All right, let me ask you this, Frank.

You want to be a serious musician, I assume.

I've always wanted to be a serious musician.

And where are you going from here,

besides the bizarre that

you're doing at this point?

I mean, where are you going to go from here,

and what do you want to achieve,

at this point now?

Well, I think one thing

that I'd like to do is to not work.

- Not work.

- Yes.

- In any field? Not write?

- For a while.

I'd like to write, but that's not work.

Meaning composing isn't working.

No.

Well, isn't that what you're going to do

for a livelihood, eventually?

People don't compose for a livelihood,

especially in the United States.

The composition end of

my musical experience

started in high school,

when I heard an album by Edgard Varse.

I said, "Boy, that sounds great.

"I have to write some of that."

I also got ahold of an album

called The Rite of Spring.

It was on a little cheapo label.

Little \$1.98 thing.

And that excited me, too.

I thought, "Boy, if anybody

could make a missing link

"between Edgard Varse and Igor Stravinsky,

that'd be pretty nifty."

And then somebody turned me on

to an album of music

by Anton Webern, and I said, "Wow!

"If anybody could get a missing link

between Igor Stravinsky, Anton Webern,

"and Edgard Varse, that'd be really spiffy."
Then I heard what some of
the stuff sounded like that I'd been writing,
and it was so ugly
that I decided to go backwards
and get into the melodic area again.
And then people started telling me
that my melodies were ugly, so...
I guess I'm successful.
And bang, here we are
with the Mothers of Invention,
so now it's going
to be a bit special.
It's an American pop music band which is
connected with pop in a certain way,
by jazz, rhythm 'n' blues and blues.
But their leader Frank Zappa
that you'll see later on and who is noticeable,
is interested in contemporary music,
and while their stage attitude might shock,
it matches very well their music.
Eccentric.
It's the new style.
In 20 years this music
is going to be classical.
You cannot define his music.
What he does is anti-music.
How to define his music?
He doesn't give a fuck
about the establishment.
When you founded your
record producing company,
it was more or less a reaction to
censorship problems
with the big companies...
- Yeah, MGM.
- MGM.
Because they had been
actually tampering with my...
I would finish an album
and give them the tapes,
and they would take the tapes
into another secret room
and cut things out of it.

You know. That's what happened to the
We're Only in It for the Money album.
To give you an example
of what censorship was like at this company,
one of the lines that they cut out,
it took me years to find out
why this line was removed.
But in the song
Let's Make the Water Turn Black,
there's a line that says,
"And I still remember Mama
"with her apron and her pad
"feeding all the boys at Ed's Cafe."
And this is a song about these two boys
in this town that I knew, and it's...
Their mother was a waitress in a cafe.
And I couldn't understand
why they took this line out.
Two years later, in hushed whispers,
an executive from the company told me
that the pad was supposed to be
a sanitary napkin.
And they were upset
that there was a reference
to such a device in this album.
And so they told one of the
engineers at their company
to remove the line.
I heard that the professor at
the Wayne University in Detroit
has done a study of profanity
in the English language,
and he has discovered that, statistically,
the three most popular words
in the English language,
especially in the United States, are,
"Uh," "Uh," and "Uh".
And...
I'll save you the trouble of
pushing that button upstairs.
And I think it's amazing that so many people
ascribe magical properties to these words.
Don't you think, in away,
Frank, that it takes...

It takes a lively sense of guilt
to make sin fun or enjoyable,
and society decides for itself
what will be sinful?
Yeah, well, the worst part of all this is
while society is being duped
by all these maneuvers,
they have so little chance
of escaping that cycle, you know.
Just can't get out of it.
They'll just keep on being fooled.
If you talk to someone on the TV,
this isn't only the person
Frank Zappa talking there,
but for the audience at least,
it associates the
record company owner Frank Zappa,
the Mother of Invention leader Frank Zappa,
the man perhaps who's interesting...
Interested to promote his records.
What other images are there?
There might be a couple people
who think of me as a composer.
An isolated minority perhaps.
Some people think that I'm
some sort of political rebel.
Isn't it strange
the fantasies that people have?
You had one very negative
experience in Berlin...
Yes, I did.
Could you perhaps tell about that?
Yes.
We arrived in Berlin,
and we set up our equipment
at the Sportpalast.
And some students came over there,
and they said,
"We would like to have you help us
with a political action."
And they wanted to set fire
to the allied command center.
And I said, "I don't think
that is good mental health."

The minute we came onstage,
about 200 students got up
and they were waving red
banners and they were shouting,
"Ho-Ho-Ho Chi Minh. "
And they're blowing horns,
and they were throwing things on the stage,
and they were calling us
"The Mothers of Reaction,"
and they tried to ruin the concert.
And a few hundred people
were coming toward the stage,
so I increased the volume of the music.
And this noise was so loud and so ugly
that it was actually pushing them back.
It was like a science fiction story.
Meanwhile, there's all the other
thousands of people who are
sitting there looking around.
They didn't know
whether it was part of the show
that we had put together.
They thought it was, you know,
something that we might do.
There were reports that you
called these students fascists and...
I did. Yeah.
Because I think that there's
definitely a fascistic element,
not only in the left wing in Germany,
but in the United States, too.
Any sort of political ideology
that doesn't allow for the rights,
and doesn't take into consideration
the differences that people have is wrong.
I won't go for it.
I don't care what kind of label you stick on it.
This town, this town
Is a sealed tuna sandwich
Sealed tuna sandwich
With the wrapper glued...
There's this piece that I had written
over a period of years
while touring with The Mothers.

It's called 200 Motels,
and the reason it's called 200 Motels
is because all the sketches
were done either in airports
or in the hotel rooms or on the planes
or just traveling around,
so it's like a musical diary.
It's a mixed media presentation,
a combination of both film and opera,
a television show,
a rock-and-roll concert,
various different elements
that all tells a story of
when you go on the road, it makes you crazy.
This starts off with a...
Sort of a quiet string and piano background
with the strings divided into many parts.
Then we have the full-fledged
version of The Girl's Dream,
which begins with the sopranos and altos
blowing bubbles with a straw
into a paper cup
in this area A here.
And the narrator, who might
possibly be the conductor...
You know, it'd be funny to have
the conductor saying these lines.
He says, "The girl wants
to fix him some broth."
Hot broth.
Hot dog broth?
Hot dog debris
How do you like it?
Dog breath dog broth
Dog breath broth
And the chorus comes in and goes...
Doo-wee-oo, tinselcock, my baby
And then she says,
"Would you like some broth?"
And the narrator says, "Some nice soup."
And she goes, "Some hot broth?"
And the chorus goes, "Yum,"
and snaps their fingers,
and then they hum.

And he says, "Small dogs in it."

And the chorus goes, "Doggies?"

And she goes, "Hmm? Do ya?"

Then there's a fanfare where
the whole chorus screams...

Tinselcock

Blindfolds in place, please.

- Yes, sir.

- Here we go.

- Are they securely in place?

- Yes, secure, secure.

All right, mystery challenger,
will you enter and sign in please?

Primo Carnera.

- Ole!

- Ole!

- Ole!

- Ole!

- Are you in the arts?

- Yes.

Is there anything musical about your work?

Some people think so.

Then are you on the stage?

Yes.

A special kind of stage.

- You mean music stage.

- Yes.

Are you... Are you also a composer?

Yes.

Arlene?

Are you part of a group?

Yes.

Soupy

Do you have a mustache?

- Yes.

- You Frank Zappa?

- Yes.

- Yes!

- Good boy, Soup!

- Yeah.

- Good for you, Soupy!

- Very good!

Yeah! That's right.

Attaboy, Soup! Two Franks.

Tell us about the movie, Frank,
that you've been involved with.
We just finished a film called 200 Motels.
It's the first feature film
to be shot on videotape.
And we used four cameras,
shot it in seven days
at Pinewood Studios in England,
and it was transferred
to 35 mm film by a company called Vidtronics
that has a process that takes
the normal TV line,
which is straight, and makes it
go wiggly like that,
and they interlock, and the result is, on film,
it looks like a 35 mm negative.

You are Volman.

See, but you're getting Martin
back there and everybody.

You're waking them all up.

Well, you may call me Rance Muhammitz.

It took four years
to write the orchestra music.

It took about two and a half or three weeks
to write the script.

It took 10 days to rehearse it,
seven days to shoot it,
11 days for videotape editing,
and three months for film editing,
and the rest of the time was negative cutting
- and transfer...

- And, you know,
talking about all that time,
we've ran out, Frank.

So, why don't you stay with us, and I'll say
we'll continue right after this word.

Ooh, the way you love me, lady
I get so hard now I could die
Ooh, the way you love me, sugar
I get so hard now I could die
Open up your pocketbook
Get another quarter out
Drop it in the meter, mama
And try me on for size

As far as anyone here can remember,
this is the first time anything of this sort
has ever happened at the Albert Hall.
5,000 or so fans were booked
for the Frank Zappa concert
with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.
Then the Albert Hall management
got a copy of his script
from his agent who'd hired the hall.
You've had bookings for pop concerts
in Albert Hall before,
surely you must have learned
to expect this type of thing.
Yes, I think it's a little more than a...
A little more than a pop concert, you see.
This was booked as a concert,
and it was only after that
that we were told that it was
all part of a film with a script,
in addition to the songs and the music.
But who are you trying to protect
by canceling the concert?
The reputation of the hall, I suppose.
Anybody who might come
thinking that they're going to hear
a concert with the
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra,
our seat holders.
I don't see why the Albert Hall
would need a script in the first place,
because we weren't doing a play,
we were doing an orchestra
and group concert.
And we gave them a copy
of the lyrics in their original form,
along with a copy of the lyrics
as we would amend them to
remove any objectionable words.
And then we found out that one of the things
that they were complaining about was a line
in one of the orchestra pieces
where somebody says,
"You know what kind of a girl
works in a boutique?"

"The kind of a girl with a sister
who wears a brassiere to a pop festival."

Now, that was one of the things
that they objected to in the text.

And so, you know, we said,

"We'll take the 'brassiere' out
"if that offends you," you know.

Or maybe it was "pop festival"
that would offend them.

But we gave them two sets of lyrics,
and they got a choice to choose between.

Do you think there was anything
in your piece that the
average person in Britain today
would consider obscene?

No.

Do you think people are still
as hung up hearing dirty words as they were
when you first started saying them?

Well, first of all, there is
no such thing as a dirty word.

I... Here's my stock line about that.

There is no word,

nor any sound that you can make
with your mouth,

that is so powerful that it will condemn you
to the lake of fire
at the time when you hear it.

Dirty words don't exist.

This is a fantasy that is manufactured
by religious fanatics
and government organizations
to keep people stupid.

Any word that gets the point
across is a good word.

If you want to tell somebody to get fucked,
that's the best way to tell them.

You know, that does the job.

And I'm interested in
getting the point across fast,
and so I use my native language
to the utmost of its capabilities.

It's got great things in it.

I like the American language.

Penis dimension
Penis dimension
Penis dimension is worrying me
I can't hardly sleep at night
'Cause of penis dimension
Do you worry?
Do you worry a lot?
Do you worry?
Do you worry and moan
That the size of your cock
Is not monstrous enough?
It's your penis dimension
Sometimes when... To see you in action
or see the group in action,
gives an impression
of being very well-rehearsed,
very, very well-written.
Are there no improvisations at all
in the concert?
There's plenty of improvisation in a concert,
but what you see as being well-rehearsed
is the structure that allows
that improvisation to occur
within specified time periods
during the show.
And that improvisation includes
not only instrumental solos,
but also dialogue that can be inserted
and different vocal things
that can be done during a show.
Or also the sequence of events in a show.
That's all subject to change
from night to night.
But the blocks of material,
each song is pretty thoroughly rehearsed.
I don't like to go out onstage
and slop around.
The air
Escaping from your pits
The hair escaping from my teeth
From you
My hands are gripping but they're slipping
And they're dripping 'cause I'm tripping
I got busted...

You're mainly the boss.
Well, I don't like to think of myself as a boss.
You know, that sounds snotty.
In regards to the group,
I function in the same way
that a conductor of
a symphony orchestra functions,
with the slight difference
that I'm also the author
of the musical material
that's being performed.
But if I direct the group,
it has nothing to do with,
you know, imposing my will upon them.
It's like a referee at a sports match,
where I will decide what the balance
between the instruments is,
and who's going to play what,
when they come in and so forth.
It helps to keep the material organized.
The Bee Gees!
Won't you be
Hear my
Plea
Do any or has any of your band members
throughout the years used drugs,
and how do you control your band members?
Do you have a tight reign on them
as far as drug use?
When a person takes the job in the band,
they understand that
what they do in their private lives
is their business, but if they're on the road,
they are representing me,
they're representing my music,
and they're representing
the need for the audience
to get entertainment on time.
That means you don't go to jail
while you're on the road, okay?
And so I ask them not to use drugs.
If they want to do it
when they get home, fine,
but when they're on the road,

please don't do it.

Because it's...

Aside from the chemical damage,
there's the legal risk that somebody's
gonna take their freedom away,
and I'm gonna be sitting there going,
"Where's the drummer?"

You know?

I don't want any of that.

And I have fired people for using drugs.

What was your initial reaction to drugs?

I mean...

Well...

I've never taken any acid.

I've smoked about 10 joints

over a period of nine years.

They gave me a sore throat

and made me sleepy.

I've not had any cosmic revelations.

I don't feel any closer or farther away

from the center of cosmic consciousness

because of the use of drugs.

Anything else that I put in my body,

aside from peanut butter and coffee,

is by prescription.

The closest I get to heavy drug use

is when I'm on the road

and I take penicillin because I get the clap.

That's it.

"To many people,

Zappa has often seemed to be

"a force of cultural darkness,

bearded and gross and filthy,

"entirely obscene, a Mephistophelian figure

"serving as a lone brutal

reminder of music's potential

"for invoking chaos and destruction."

That's from Time in October 1969.

"By any standard,

he was quite outstandingly ugly."

And finally, "I was never a hippie.

"Always a freak, but never a hippie."

Frank Zappa on Frank Zappa.

Well, Frank, during the past few days,

I've been reading some of the things
that you've said about groupies.
And you've said quite a lot.
Well, I think that it was about time
that somebody did
start discussing groupies,
because prior to that time,
it was a sociological phenomenon
that it existed in the pop world,
it's been existing for years and years,
and nobody even said anything about it.
And I was the first one to put it in print.
Well, can I just quote what you did say?
You said, "They make the
ultimate gesture of worship,
"human sacrifice." That's...
We've been a program of ill repute,
but in this regard, like, Monday Conference,
it wouldn't be as male sexist as that.
- I'm not...
- "Gesture of worship"? "Human sacrifice"?
But that is exactly what happens.
- And it's all right?
- So all you have to do
is describe what's happening.
I'm describing a phenomenon.
Why should you call it sexist?
You said it's also...
It's one of the most amazingly
beautiful products of the sexual revolution.
Why "beautiful"?
Well, you'd have to go on the road
and check it out a few times.
Welcome everyone
to this year's final edition of Opopoppa
here at Skansen Solliden.
Taking the lead of this gang,
we have a gentleman
who variously has been called
a musician, a critic,
he has also been called
a spokesman of a lost generation.
He is called seducer, he is called freak,
perverted genius and businessman.

I am talking about Frank Zappa
and The Mothers of Invention.
The mystery man came over
And he said I'm outta sight
He said for a nominal service charge
I could reach nirvana tonight
If I was ready, willing and able
To pay him his regular fee
He would drop all the rest
of his pressing affairs
And devote his attention to me
But I said
Look here, brother
Who you jivin' with that Cosmik Debris?
Who you jivin' with that Cosmik Debris?
Look here, brother
Don't you waste your time on me
Is commercial success
important to you, rather than
making enough money to do
what you want to do?
Well, commercial success
represents two things.
One, it represents dollars and cents,
and two, it represents
reaching a large audience.
The dollars and cents
I'm comfortable with right now,
because I manage to make enough
from the concert tours
and so forth, publishing,
to pay for the equipment that I use,
and to pay the people
who are making the music.
But the problem about reaching
a larger audience is...
It's important to me because
more people know my face from a poster
or from doing an interview
on television or radio or magazine,
than have ever heard the albums,
or have ever seen the group live, you know?
So, it makes you wonder.
I... I'm famous, but most people

don't even know what I do.
One, two, one, two, three, four.
All right, now that's the melody.
Now, we're gonna play...
The melody will now be sung.
Everybody is going to sing their part.
One, two, one, two, three, four.
Chester, you're not singing your drum fills.
It's so incredibly ironic
that there's so many people
that listen to your stuff
and say, "Hey, he must've been really stoned
- "to have thought that up."
- That's because
people are just not
accustomed to excellence.
They're not trained to it, you know?
Because when you go to school,
you're not given the criteria
by which to judge
between quality this or quality that.
All they do is teach you just enough
to be some kind of a slug
in a factory, to do your job,
so you can take home a paycheck
and consume some other stuff
that somebody else makes.
And there's no emphasis
in schools in the United States
put on people...
Preparing people to live a life
that has beautiful things in it.
You know, things that might
bring them aesthetic enrichment.
This is not a major consideration
in the United States.
How did you manage to escape
all that negative brainwashing?
I got out of school as fast as I could.
Don't you feel miffed
that you have this stigma attached to you,
from the younger crowd
that comes out to your concerts,
that you are into drugs,

and obviously you're not,
or don't you feel that you have that?
Well, yeah, it's kind of an affliction,
but that's not from the kids,
that's from the media, you know.
It's another way that the media
keeps me from getting
my point of view across.
The more abstract and weird
they make me look,
the less access that I have
to a normal channel of communication
with the people who might benefit
from what I have to say.
Which is one of the reasons
why I'm doing this.
I feel very strongly about my point of view.
I think there are other people
that might agree with it, if they heard it,
and I'll do whatever I can
to say my point of view
wherever it can be said.
But you don't see me on
normal television very often.
You don't hear the records
on the radio very often.
If you read about me in the papers,
they write about me like I'm a maniac.
I'm not. I'm 40 years old and I'm normal.
I got four kids, a house and
a mortgage and all that crap.
You know?
I'm a... And I'm an American citizen.
I'm happy to be that way.
I pay taxes and everything.
Has it been hard to juggle
the career with the family life?
I know you've got... You've got kids...
Yeah, I have a wife, four kids,
mortgage, the works.
- And? How is it?
- Yeah, it's hard to juggle.
Well, I've been married to
the same wife for 14 years.

What's she like?

She's a mean little sucker.

I bet she'd have to be to put up with you.

She's a... She's an excellent boss's wife.

Everybody knows that Gail is the boss's wife.

And what are the kids like?

How do they feel about you as their dad?

They like me.

Do you end up spending a lot
of time with them, then?

When I'm home.

All right.

I'm gonna tell you one more time.

I want to thank you

because I really appreciate this.

The name of this song is Dinah-Moe Humm.

One, two, three, four.

I couldn't say where she's comin' from

But I just met a lady named Dinah-Moe Humm

Strolled on over, said, "Look here, bum

"I got a \$40 bill says you can't make me come

"No way! You just can't do it"

She made a bet with her sister

Who's a little bit dumb

She could prove at any time

All men was scum

I don't mind that she called me a bum

But I knew right away

She was really gonna come

So I got down to it

Whipped off her bloomers

And stiffened my tongue

And applied rotation to her sugar plum

I poked and stroked till my wrist got numb

Still didn't hear no Dinah-Moe Humm

Dinah-Moe Humm

Dinah-Moe Humm, Dinah-Moe Humm

Where's this Dinah-Moe coming from?

I done spent three hours

And I ain't got a crumb

From the Dinah-Moe, Dinah-Moe

Dinah-Moe, Dinah-Moe Humm

Got a spot that gets me hot

And you ain't been to it

Got a spot that gets me hot
And you ain't been to it
Got a spot that gets me hot
You ain't been to it
Got a spot that gets me hot
You ain't been to it
'Cause I can't get into it unless I get out of it
And I gotta get out of it to get myself into it
I can't get into it unless I get out of it
And I gotta get out of it before I get into it
She looked over at me with a glazed eye
And some bovine perspiration
on her upper lip area
And she said
And here's what she said
"Just get me wasted and you're halfway there
Cause if my mind's tore up
"Well, then my body won't care"
I rubbed my chinny-chin-chin
And said, "My, my, my
"What sort of thing
Might this lady get high upon?"
The \$40 bill didn't matter no more
When her sister got naked
And laid on the floor
She said, "Dinah-Moe might win the bet
"But she could use a little
"If I wasn't dead yet"
I told her just because the sun
Want a place in the sky
No reason to assume I wouldn't give her a try
So I puffed on her hair
Got her legs in the air
And asked her if she had
any cooties in there...
Frank, whatever happened to Popestock,
as you called it?
When the Pope wanted us to...
When the Pope thought
that maybe you would play
- at a huge benefit...
- Well, you have to understand, it's...
We're not talking about
the Pope that's in there now,

and we're not talking about
the quickie guy who died,
who was, you know, just in there a little bit.
It was the one before that,
who got in touch with my former manager,
and asked if we would go to the Vatican
and play a special concert at the Vatican
that would draw all these
children to the Vatican,
so that he could address them
and deliver his message to them.

And I refused to do it.

- You refused to do it.

- Yeah.

Why didn't you do it?

I don't do it for the Pope,
and I don't do it for political leaders,
I don't do it for unions,
I don't do it for organizations.
I do it for music.

We've been offered, three or four times,
to play for the big
communist party picnic in France,
you know, the... Which is the big
social event there they have every summer.
And they offer a lot of money.

You know, "We'll pay you. Come and do this.
"Everybody will see you."

No, I don't want to work for the Communists.
Fuck the Communists, you know.

I don't like those people.

And I do my music for people who like music.

Hey, there, well, I'm Bobby Brown

They say I'm the cutest boy in town

My car is fast

My teeth is shiny

I tell all the girls they can kiss my heinie

Here I am at a famous school

I'm dressing sharp and I'm acting cool

I got a cheerleader here

Wants to help with my paper

Let her do all the work

And maybe later I'll rape her

Oh, God, I am the American Dream

I do not think I'm too extreme
And I'm a handsome son of a bitch
I'm gonna get a good job
And be real rich...
They could never play
Bobby Brown on U.S. radio.
It was successful because, outside the U.S.,
the song was played on the radio.
People, I was not ready...
I'm not sure that it was the lyrics
that really made it popular.
The place where it took off first was Norway,
and the people liked the tune.
I remember going to Norway,
when the thing was still a hit,
and going to a disco,
and seeing people dancing close together,
like it was a ballad.
They were out on the dance floor.
It was the song to slow-dance to
in Norwegian discos.
It was the largest-selling single
in CBS's history,
in Scandinavia, at that time.
Am I a boy or a lady?
I don't know which
I wonder, wonder, wonder, wonder
So I went out and bought me a leisure suit
I jingle my change, but I'm still kind of cute
Got a job doing radio promo
And none of the jocks
Can even tell I'm a homo
Eventually, me and a friend
Sorta drifted along into S&M
I can take about an hour
on the tower of power
Long as I get a little golden shower
Oh, God, I am the American Dream
With a spindle up my butt
Till it makes me scream
And I'll do anything to get ahead
I lay awake nights saying, "Thank you, Fred"
Oh, God, oh, God, I'm so fantastic
Thanks to Freddy, I'm a sexual spastic

And my name is Bobby Brown
Watch me now
I'm going down
And my name is Bobby Brown
Watch me now, I'm a-goin' down
My name is Bobby Brown...
That's Frank Zappa, ladies and gentlemen,
one of the legends, legendary man.
Used to watch this man when I was just a kid.
Just a kid out there
in the slums of Beverly Hills.
And, multi-faceted composer, am I right?
- Right.
- Right.
How many songs have you composed?
- 300.
- You're kidding! 300?
Well, why would you kid about that?
Master musician.
Film director, right?
- Right.
- Producer?
- Yep.
- Motion...
Not a motion picture, but you're kind of
a record company magnate.
- You have your own building, at this point?
- Yes.
You always were a renegade
against the music business.
Why?
Because most of what
the music business does
is not musical.
What do you mean by that?
Because it's designed to create product
and not to create music.
There's this lack of integrity,
is what you're saying.
Well, the music business, as a business,
is interested in doing things
that I'm not interested in.
All right, here is Frank Zappa's new album
called Tinseltown Rebellion.

Now, there's some very, very
interesting lyrics,
and I would like to read some of them to you.
"Did you know that, in Tinseltown..."
That's Hollywood, right?
"Hollywood," as they say out here.
"The people there think substance is a bore
"And if your New Wave group looks good
"They'll hurry on back for more
"Of leather groups and plastic groups
"And groups that look real queer
"The Tinseltown aficionados
Come to see and not to hear."
- That's pretty explicit, isn't it?
- Yeah.
In other words, what are we saying?
That the lyrics have
the intellectual consistency of toothpaste?
That guys just want to make money?
The record guys?
Is that what you're telling us?
- I... Let me quote to you...
- Please.
...from something that I prepared
for Newsweek magazine,
which they have since rejected.
I wrote this little article for the section
in there that's called "My Turn,"
and the name of the article was Say Cheese.
And the whole idea of the
article is, we, as a nation,
have chosen cheese as a way of life.
Everything that we choose to do,
we always settle for something that's cheesy,
because of some economic expedient,
and we're too eager to believe
when people tell us
that budget-cutting is the way to salvation,
that all we have to do is
cut the budget of something,
and everything will be okay. This is wrong.
And we're not concerned enough
about the quality of our lives.
I sense though that there is a deep,

permanent, irreversible cynicism in you.
And I wish that I could have
other people catch some of it.
I used to play all kinds of stuff
And some of it was nice
Some of it was musical
But then they took some guy's advice
To get a record deal, he said
They would have to be more punk
Forget their chops and play real dumb
or else they would be sunk
So off they go to S-I-R
To learn some stupid riffs
Oh, no
- No!
- Oh, no, no, no, no, no
- No!
- It's the '80s again
No, no, no, no, no, no, no
No, no, no, no, no, no, no
And when they think they've got it
They launch a new career
Who gives a fuck if what they play
Is somewhat insincere?
Let's dance the blues again, get down
Dance the blues again, everybody
Dance the blues again, hey
I write the songs
That make the young girls cry
Did you know that in Tinseltown
The people down there think
That substance is a bore?
And if your New Wave group looks good
Well, hurry on back for more
of leather groups
Why do I
Go rock you like a nincompoop?
And plastic groups
Whip it good
And groups that look real queer
I'll tumble for ya, I'll tumble for ya
I'll tumble for
Moo, moo-moo, moo, moo
Moo, moo-moo, moo, moo

Moo, moo-moo, moo, moo

Moo, moo-moo

Moo Ann

The Tinseltown aficionados
Come to see and not to hear
But then again, the system
Works as perfect as a dream
It works for all of those
Record company pricks
Who come to skim the
Cream

The thing that sets the
Americans apart from the rest
of the cultures in the world
is we're so fucking stupid.
This country's been around
for a couple hundred years,
and we think we're hot shit.
And they don't... We don't even realize
that other countries have thousands of years
of history and culture,
and they're proud of it.
And when we deal on an
international level, you know,
with foreign policy and stuff like that,
and we try and go in as,
you know, a big American
strong country and all that stuff,
they must laugh up their sleeves at us,
because we are nothing.
We are culturally nothing.
We mean nothing.

We're only interested in the bottom line.
You know, every other country
has their own art,
their own music, their own theater,
their own drama, their folk dances,
folk songs, folklore,
and it means something to them,
and they're proud of it,
and that's their ethnic heritage.
We have Levi's, we have designer jeans,
we have hamburgers, we have Coca-Cola,
we have REO Speedwagon, we have Journey,

we have this one, we have that one.
And then we go out there and we say,
"Yeah, but we also have
neutron bombs and poison gas,
"so maybe that makes up for it."
I mean, it's really kind of sad
when you evaluate it that way.
And I think that a country
that doesn't do something
to sustain its culture, whatever it is,
doesn't invest in it,
doesn't keep it happening, isn't proud of it,
maybe they just shouldn't exist,
because it's the culture
and the beautiful things
that a society produces,
those are the things that should survive
for thousands of years,
not the designer jeans.
Tomorrow night,
the London Symphony Orchestra
are giving a concert at their
home in the Barbican Centre.
Nothing much new in that.
But what is new is that
the program of orchestral music
they'll be playing is music written by
the celebrated
American rock star Frank Zappa,
a man once banned, if you remember,
from the Royal Albert Hall
because his lyrics were
thought to be too obscene.
Robin Denselow's been looking
at the least known
and the least commercial side of Zappa's art.
Frank Zappa has been quietly writing pieces
for a full orchestra,
alongside his rock work, for years.
For their first ever performance,
he's using the London Symphony
Orchestra and so many musicians
that they might not fit on the Barbican stage.
It's going to be difficult.

It's going to be maybe even painful for some of them. The LSO are rehearsing compositions that Zappa has written from 1975 on, but which he is only hearing now for the first time. The conductor, Kent Nagano, mostly works in San Francisco and was chosen by Zappa. As the LSO grapple with the highly complicated, unusual rhythm structures, Nagano agrees he's not given them an easy time. He regards the compositions as very important. For Zappa, it doesn't seem to matter that his simpler rock songs are far better known than these serious compositions. I think that it's just as serious to write a song like Valley Girl as it is to write a ballet called Mo 'n Herb's Vacation. To me, they're equally serious problems in music. Really? I mean, one must take you, what, a matter of days, and the other a matter of months and months. Well, in the case of Valley Girl, it took me a matter of moments, but in the case of some of the orchestra pieces, they'll take, like, six months to write, but that doesn't mean there's any less seriousness involved in the construction of each piece, because they're for different mediums, they're for different audiences, and they deal with different kinds of musical problems. At the rehearsals, Zappa sat out in the stalls, but made sure that Nagano and the orchestra

were always aware
of exactly what he wanted.
Why don't we split it up
with all 1-As doing that?

- How about that?

- Okay.

Excuse me.

So could you take
a look please, everyone. 159.
Ready, and...

Don't get ahead.

And...

Do you expect to actually make
any money out of the concert
and the recordings that you've
come here to make with the LSO?

No. No.

Why, then, do you do it?

Well, I think that any artistic
decision that is based on
whether or not you're going
to make money is not really
an artistic decision, it's a business decision.

And there are a lot of things
that I can do to earn a living,
and a lot of things that I've
already done to earn a living,
which have produced
the amount of capital needed
to do this project.

I came here to spend money
on an English orchestra,
to record my music so I can take it home
and I can listen to it.

And if somebody else likes that kind of stuff,
I will make it available on a record
so that they can hear it.

That is my part of the public service
of spending the money
to make this event happen.

No foundation grant,
no government assistance,
no corporation, no committee,
just a crazy guy who spent the money

to hire English musicians
to do a concert at the Barbican
and make an album
for Barking Pumpkin Records.
Frank, is it good? Is the music good?
I think it's fantastic.
And you're on.
All right, we're rolling.

- Now what?

- Just do it.

- Do what?

- Go in after, you know,

"The Constitution's coming here."

You say, "And this is Frank Zappa."

- Okay.

- Porn Wars, right?

This is Frank Zappa with
tonight's edition of Porn Wars.

Has rock and roll finally gone too far?

Well, a growing number of people think so,
and today they took their case
to a U.S. Senate hearing.

Their complaint? That rock lyrics and videos
are crossing the line into trash and smut.

Some parent groups want to rate
rock records that may contain
objectionable material
the way movies are rated.

Tipper Gore, wife of Tennessee
Democratic Senator Albert Gore,
called for voluntary warning labels
on raunchy and violent rock albums.

Frank Zappa was one of the
rock stars who opposed the idea.

We now propose one generic warning label
to inform consumers in the marketplace
about lyric content.

The labels would apply to all music.

The PMRC proposal is an
ill-conceived piece of nonsense
which fails to deliver any real
benefits to children,
infringes the civil liberties
of people who are not children,

and promises to keep the courts
busy for years dealing with
the interpretational
and enforcemental problems
inherent in the proposal's design.
Zappa, whose albums are
often sexually explicit,
described Mrs. Gore and her supporters as
"the wives of Big Brother."
You're taking a very drastic step
toward national censorship.
And whenever censorship is
mentioned, these wives go wild.
You know, it's like
The Emperor's New Clothes.
"This is not censorship, no."
Censorship implies restricting
access or suppressing content.
This proposal does neither.
And the media thinks,
"Well, they're very, you know,
"they wouldn't lie, they're very cute,
they're from Washington."
Porn rock.
But if it looks like censorship
and it smells like censorship,
it is censorship, no matter
whose wife is talking about it.
It's censorship.
"Pyromania."
No question.
Burn a building.
Burn, burn, burn.
These right-wing people
have this fetish about the right to life.
What about the right
to the life of an unborn idea?
How much are you gonna miss out
on in the United States
if you won't let people think,
say what they think
and do something about it,
so that people who don't think
and are too busy doing something else

can have the benefit
of the people who think?
It is a stupid waste
of resource to take the ability
to think for yourself, or to allow somebody
who might think for you
in a positive way to generate ideas
that can turn into something...
Income for instance,
to stop that from happening.
It is incredibly short-sighted.
That's...

Yes.

You say you have four children?

- Yes.

- Pardon me?

- Four children.

- Four children.

Have you ever purchased toys
for those children?

No, my wife does.

Well... I might tell you
that if you were to go in a toy store,
which is very educational
for fathers, by the way,
it's not a maternal responsibility
to buy toys for children,
that you may look on the box
and the box says, "This is suitable for
5 to 7 years of age," or "8 to 15"
or "15 and above,"

to give you some guidance
for a toy for a child.

Do you object to that?

In a way, I do.

Because that means that
somebody in an office someplace
is telling... Making the decision
about how smart my child is.

I'd be interested to see
what toys your kids ever had.

Why would you be interested?

Just as a point of interest in this...

Well, come on over to the house,

I'll show them to you.

- Really.

- I... I might do that.

Have you ever made... Do you make a profit from sales of rock records?

Yes.

So you do make a profit from sales of rock records.

Yes.

Thank you. I think that statement tells the story to this committee.

Thank you.

Crossfire.

On the left, Tom Braden.

on the right, Robert Novak.

In the crossfire,

Washington Times columnist John Lofton and rock musician Frank Zappa.

But why do you underestimate the power of words?

Words have consequences.

They have impact on people.

Now, I agree with you that the first line of responsibility is the family to stop the kind of garbage that we're talking about here today, but good grief, can't we call on our government to help us in this fight, Frank?

I mean, you have kids. Are you an anarchist?

Is it the government's role to do nothing about this?

No, I'm a conservative, and you may not like that, but I am.

What is the function of government, Frank, the civil government?

Isn't it to, in part, promote the general welfare and to help protect families?

Does the government have any purpose, Frank?

- Yeah, it has a number of purposes.

- What? What is it?

- Name one.

- I'm not gonna give you a civics lesson here,
- but I'll tell you one thing.
- Yeah.

We must not see eye to eye
on the idea of a government
that must forbid things
- in order to protect families.
- Really? What is the government's role?
You've told me several times
what it shouldn't do.
How about national defense
and making sure things...
Yeah, I consider this national defense, pal.
Our families are under attack
from people like you with these lyrics.
John, you don't have to bite him.
Mr. Zappa...
Could I make a statement
about national defense?
- Yeah.
- The biggest threat to America today
is not communism, it's moving America
toward a fascist theocracy.
And everything that's happened
during the Reagan administration
is steering us right down that pipe.
Mr. Zappa, do you... Do you...
Yes, Mr. Zappa.
- Wait a minute.
- In what way?
- Give me... Give me one...
- Wait, wait, wait, wait.
One example, one example
of a fascist theocracy.
When you have a government
that prefers a certain moral code
derived from a certain religion,
and that moral code turns into
legislation to suit
- one certain religious point of view...
- Mr. Zappa. Mr. Zappa.
- ...and if that code...
- Frank.
...happens to be very, very right-wing,

almost toward Attila the Hun...
Well, then you are an anarchist.
Every form of civil government
is based on some kind of morality, Frank.
Morality in terms of behavior...
- Well, of course.
- ...not in terms of theology.
Rock and roll is here to stay,
but it will never make everyone happy,
and the latest controversy involves
sexual and violent lyrics.
A number of parents groups
want warning labels on records.
Today, as NBC's Robert Hagar reports now,
the record industry
came up with its own solution.
The record industry has agreed
to a voluntary self-policing code
by which warning labels
can now be stuck on albums
with explicit lyrics on topics like
sex, drugs and violence.
But the biggest warning sticker in town
is on the new album by Frank Zappa.
He stuck it on himself
to guarantee, as he puts it,
that it won't "cause eternal
torment in the place
"where the guy with the pointed
stick conducts his business."
...friend
When the lies get so big
And the fog gets so thick
And the facts disappear
The Republican trick
Can be played out again
People, please tell me when
We'll be rid of these men
Just who do they really
Suppose that they are?
And how do they manage to travel as far
As they seem to have come?
Were we really that dumb?
People, wake up

Figure it out
Religious fanatics
Around and about
The courthouse, the statehouse
The Congress, the White House
Criminal saints
With a heavenly mission
A nation enraptured
By pure superstition
Is everybody happy?
Very few rock musicians
have been as controversial as Frank Zappa,
but there is no controversy about his talent
or about his role
as a rock-and-roll innovator.
So today, we will be at home
with Frank Zappa.
Frank, how are you this morning?
Boy, you know, I don't like
to get up this early, that's for sure.
You got a Grammy for Jazz from Hell.
Is it... Does that mean anything extra to you?
Well, I think that it's, you know, living proof
that the whole process is a fraud.
This is a little plastic joke, the Grammy itself.
I got it for a song called Jazz from Hell,
which I'm convinced nobody has ever heard,
and I don't know why they
gave me a Grammy for this song.
It was the most obscure track on a CD
called Jazz from Hell.
We're in a different part of the house.
Looks like you've got
an entire studio set up there.
That's right.
- You may...
- I'll just walk over here.
- Yeah, yeah, let's look around a little bit.
- Yeah.
There's something you're sitting by now
that I'm not even sure how to pronounce it.
Can you explain it?
Well, it's a machine called a Synclavier,
which is...

This is the machine that produced
that Grammy award-winning song
Jazz from Hell.
That some... That everyone is humming
-on the way to work this morning.
- Yeah.
What... What does the machine do?
How does it work?
Well, it allows you to
perform on the keyboard.
You could play a composition
on the keyboard
which is then stored
in the computer memory,
and then you edit what you played,
or you can type in information
on this keypad here
and edit what you played.
The sequence that's in here now
sounds like this.
Okay, let's say you happen
to think that that was
really a good groove, and you wanted to
have that played by something
other than a drum set.
Just go to the back again
and look for some other kind of
a noise to play it back.
How about...
Let's take Spastic... Spastic Droopers is okay.
Do you ever think the electronics
and the microchips can kind of
get in the way, though,
of the actual true music itself,
or what you're really trying to get at?
No, actually it improves it by
subtracting the human element,
which is the most unreliable part
of doing music.
I thought that was supposed to be
part of the creative process though.
Employing musicians? Hell, no.

10:

personalities of the rock world
steps out of the plane,
the 49 year old Frank Zappa.
Never before, in 25 years in rock-and-roll
have I gotten off of an airplane
and seen anything like that.
- How long have you been waiting for this?
- My whole life.
I am here to see my prince.
I feel so tired, but so happy to be in Prague,
but I'll bet
I don't feel as happy as you do
to have a brand new country.
And I give you my congratulations
on your political success.
What I would say to Zappa?
We started playing his music in 1972
with our band "Elektrobus"
and were hunted by the police for that.
When we were interrogated the cops told us:
We will take your Zappa away,
you will not spread his ideology here.
Obviously they looked at him
as a political ideologist,
kind of an anti-communist leader
of an ideologically alternative group.
Today president Vclav Havel
welcomed Frank Zappa
the leading representative
of rock music at the castle.
The friendly and informal atmosphere
was supported by the fact
that the president
knew Zappa's music very well.
Is Mr. Havel the first president
you've met in your life personally?
Yes.
There's no official title.
In fact, I don't think
they've ever invented a name
for what it is that I expect
to be doing for them.
They want me to help them to develop trade,
tourism and things in the cultural field.

Even if I'm doing something
like a business deal,
it is a type of composition.
I view the whole thing as composition.
Mr. Zappa, can you tell me
what this contract is about?
It is to release records, CDs, and cassettes
of my music, in Czechoslovakia,
for the first time.
Legally.

I've been playing music in
the United States for 25 years.
Most people in that country
don't even know what I do,
and they would be shocked
to see these people
standing here, listening to me, right now.
They would think you are crazy.
You have a lot of fans here,
so if you fuck up it in America,
so, then, you can rely on
your Czech listeners.
Can you sing the number?

Frankie!

Love of my life
I love you so
Love of my life
Don't ever go
I love you only
Love, love of my life
You know, they won't play this
on the radio in America.
Love of my life
I love you so...
Took Ike's watch like they always do...

Draws

There's two things
you ought to consider here.
One is the possibility
that the whole body of my work
- is one composition.
- Right.
And only separated into individual tracks,
so to speak, because I'm

releasing it on records,
and it takes me years to put it together.
But, if I was all done,
and you stuck it all together,
it's one composition, basically.
And a theme that started off in,
you know, on the first record,
could just as easily occur, later on, with
no... No reason other than,
since the whole mass of work
is one composition,
why can't you recapitulate a theme
that started off years ago?
I wound up with a style of music
that has snorks, burps,
and dissonant chords,
and nice tunes and triads
and straight rhythms
and complicated rhythms,
and just about anything, in any order.
Right.

And the easiest way
to sum up the aesthetic would be,
anything, anytime, anyplace,
for no reason at all.
And I think with an aesthetic like that,
you can have pretty good latitude
for being creative.
What is wrong with it?

- No, no...
- No.

In my band, when somebody
would make a mistake
of that magnitude,
it's called a "strong wrong," so...
But other than that, it sounded really good.
You know, to some,
Frank Zappa is a legend in rock music.
To others, he's a bizarre performer
with a penchant for lascivious lyrics.
But what few realize is that he's also
a serious and respected classical composer.
Today Show national correspondent,
Jamie Gangel,

is here this morning
with a rare interview with Frank Zappa,
an interview that almost didn't happen,
because Frank Zappa is also quite ill.
- Jamie, how's he doing?
- He's not doing well.
He's been suffering from prostate cancer
for a number of years,
and we really got the impression
that it took all of his strength
to even do this interview.
And although he guards his privacy,
he talked about his cancer,
and in spite of it all,
at 52, Frank Zappa is still Frank Zappa,
funny, opinionated, and off the wall.
For the last four years,
Zappa has focused on classical music.
Almost unheard in America,
he sells out concert halls in Europe.
Tell me about The Yellow Shark concert.
It was... It got an extraordinary reaction.
How'd you feel about that?
Well, as I said to you a little earlier,
there's no accounting for taste.
Come on!
You must have been thrilled.
I was sick.
Some... So it's hard to be truly thrilled.
But, I was... I was happier that they did that
rather than throw things at the stage.
You have made a career
out of making fun of everybody,
gays, Jewish-American princesses,
and you have taken a lot of heat for it.
Does that bother you at all?
No. I'm totally unrepentant.
Is there anything you ever did
that you were sorry for in music?
No.
A lot of performers
do things that are shocking,
or might be considered
obscenity or pornography,

but you get singled out a lot, I think.

Do you have any idea why?

'Cause I'm ugly.

Stop!

Well, you know, the...

In this world of basic stereotyping,

give a guy a big nose

and some weird hair,

and he's capable of anything.

You're a legendary workaholic.

- Are you able to work...

- Not anymore.

Not anymore.

Tell me.

Basically, on a good day,

I can go 9:

It's really slowed you down.

Yeah.

Can you tell me a little bit

about how you've been doing?

- Fair.

- Fair.

Yeah. Good days, bad days.

More bad days than good days?

Yeah.

Let me go through a list of words that,

whenever you read about

Frank Zappa, you hear.

And tell me how they strike you.

"Rock legend."

That's pathetic.

"Test pilot pushing the edge."

That's...

Don't you like that one a little bit?

- No.

- No?

No.

It's a little bit too...

Got that military aroma to it.

"Eccentric genius"?

Eccentric, yes. Genius, maybe.

"Funny guy."

Only to a few.

Here's a question,
you'll know exactly what it is,
and that is, how does Frank Zappa
want to be remembered?
That's not important.
Not important at all?
Want to be remembered for the music?
It's not important to even be remembered.
I mean, the people who worry
about being remembered
are guys like Reagan, Bush.
These people want to be remembered.
And they'll spend a lot of money
and do a lot of work to make sure
that remembrance is just terrific.
And for Frank Zappa?
I don't care.
One, two, three, four.
You're 18.
Take the spoon out of your nose,
take the needle out of your arm,
take the beer out of your mouth, and go vote.
You know what I mean? Vote.
Register and vote like a beast.