

Uniquely warped Frank Zappa

By WILFRED LANGMAID
Brunswickan Staff

For two decades, eclectic and offbeat guitarist/composer Frank Zappa has been in the public eye. His latest album *Them Or Us* brings his total album count to an amazing 39; the musically diverse effort shows Zappa's considerable composition talents, playing abilities, and uniquely warped personality.

Always one for surprises, Zappa gives much of *Them Or Us* a nostalgic flavour with some late 50s-style doo-wop. This hits the listener from the outset, as he begins the double album with its most straightforward cut, a cover of "The Closer You Are" which sounds really authentic with Frankie's baritone croon molded around three male harmonizers.

Them Or Us has a thankfully low proportion of the gross and vulgar songs which are, for some, the highlights of Zappa's work. Emerging as quite tasteful substitutes are such songs as: the daffy but G-rating "Truck Driver Divorce"; the lyrically biting "The Planet of My Dreams" whose melody and Bob Harris vocals recall "Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon" from the 1975 Queen album *A Night At The Opera*; the innuendo-laden, 50s sounding "Be In My Video"; and "Frogs With Dirty Little Lips" which would turn off the prospective diner of frogs' legs. "Frogs" is, in fact, perhaps the album's oddest ditty. It features a backbone of slap and pull bass by Arthur Barrow in stanzas to go along with Zappa's offbeat lyrics and

odd vocals. Each stanza is bridged curiously with parade music strains, glockenspiel and all. In the bridge, the doo-woppers adapt to do a generic little "La la la la". Let's just say that it will never make the charts. The off-colour "In France" does elicit a few chuckles; Zappa sits out on this number which gets a neat touch with the excited stutter of Johnny "Guitar" Watson on vocals. "Stevie's Spanking", which begins side three, is driving blues rock perfectly matched with the power vocals of Bobby Martin, but its story line is Zappa's most perverse on *Them Or Us* and all but MacLean and MacLean aficionados would concede that it is disgusting. One can derive from "Baby, Take Your Teeth Out", which follows, that Frankie is still in the same vein, but is a particularly interesting musical hodgepodge -doo-wop electronics, female harmonies taking the lead in the unlikely chorus, and a jazzy little keyboard break in synch with Zappa's slurred comments.

"Baby, Take Your Teeth Out" bridges into "marqueson's Chicken", one of the album's jazz fusion numbers which collectively demonstrate Zappa's wide composition talents. It breaks into a typically wild, fast, distortion-enhanced guitar solo by Zappa in its latter throes. Material of the same sort dominates the two song second side of the album which begins with the instrumental "Sinister Footwear II", a rock band version of Zappa's ballet of the same name. It sequentially features classical piano, synthesizers, and Zappa's deft but daffy guitar. This song bridges brilliantly into "Truck Driver Divorce" where the odd lyrics are set off by his unique voice followed by a signature guitar break. "Them Or Us" is an intriguing instrumental too; it is performed by a trio of guitarist Zappa, Scott Thomas on bass and mini-moog, and Chad Wackerman on drums.

Zappa makes *Them Or Us* a family affair with contributions by his two eldest children, his 16 year old daughter Moon Unit and his 14 year old son Dweezil. (Nope, that's not a misprint! His other two children have the grandiose handles Ahmet Emuukha rodan and Diva Thin Muffin Pigene). Moon Unit just does some token harmonies in the song "Ya Hozna" which features totally unintelligible lyrics; Frankie sez (no kiddies, not *that* Frankiel) "Backwards vocal - you figure it out" on the album's inner sleeve. No, thanks. However, Dweezil plays a couple of parentally reminiscent and rather astounding guitar breaks. He displays some exceptionally fast fingering in "Sharleena", a 50ish number combining Four Seasons-type harmonies, an initial reggae backbeat, and Dweezil's frantic guitar solo. Intentional distortion and all, he also does a very wake-up job on the second guitar solo in "Stevie's Spanking"; remember, he's at an age where most people are considering Duran Duran's Andy Taylor a guitar virtuoso.

Them Or Us' second cover closes the album, and it is a somewhat unlikely live recording of the Allman Brothers Band classic "Whipping Post". It is given quite a good treatment which is for the most part rather true to the original, and Bobby Martin's vocal performance is truly an impassioned one. Still, Zappa's guitar tangents, no matter how skillful they may be, just do not ring true.

Frank Zappa will never be a huge seller, and both his predictable behaviour on the guitar and his smutty tendencies can wear thin. Still, he is a talented guitarist and a composer who has a neat way of making things combine and transpire. *Them Or Us* will be loved by his fans, and its many virtues will be appreciated by other serious music observers who give it a listen.

OTHER MOTHER

March 24 to April 14, the UNB Art Centre will show an exhibition of watercolours by Leighton Davis of Halifax. Davis's 26 very large watercolours are all painted realistically - figures, interiors and still lifes.

The Art Centre in Memorial Hall is open from 10 to 5 Monday to Friday and from 2 to 4 p.m. on Sundays.

Friday and Saturday night, the Woodshed presents "Ranting Dog, The Daddi O:" a musical dramatization of the life of Robert Burns as told by his lover Gene Armour. Includes songs and poems by Lutia Lauzon and David Nielsen featuring the Harp and Violin.

Don't forget - the Woodshed is open daily, Monday - Friday from 11:30 - 2:30.

The Fredericton Folk Collective will hold its final concert for the year this Saturday, March 23, 8:30 p.m. at the UNB Memorial Hall.

The concert will feature Paul Lauzon in trio with Kevin Herring and Richard Gibson. They will be performing a melange of soft and cheerful folk music to welcome the spring! Paul says, "I'm here to make you laugh, to cry, perhaps to make you sing, surely to enjoy the pathways of the heart."

The concert will be true to Folk Collective form with candles on tables, and home baked goodies, coffee, tea, and fresh apple cider for sale. Do come and enjoy!... Admission is \$3.50.

Creative Arts presents Winnipeg's *Contemporary Dancers Canada* in a performance at the Playhouse, Wednesday, March 27, 8:00 p.m. Tickets are \$4.00 for UNB and STU students with identification and are available at the UNB Art Centre (453-5005), the Playhouse Box Office, or at the door.

Theatre St. Thomas will stage the Broadway musical *Working* at the French Cultural Centre, Ecole Ste Anne, from Wednesday, March 20 to Saturday, March 23. Curtain time each evening is 8:00 p.m.

First produced on Broadway in 1981, *Working* is a lighthearted and frequently poignant exploration of the jobs and aspirations of the working class. It is based on Studs Terkel's best selling book of interviews with workers and features contemporary songs such as James Taylor's "Millwork" and "Brother Trucker."

Tickets priced at \$5.00 for adults and \$4.00 for students will be available at the door each evening of the performance.

MALAYSIAN CULTURAL NIGHT '85

- The M.S.S. Committee wish to thank the
- 1) Cultural Night Committee, led by Thomas Tan
 - 2) NBCCA
 - 3) UNBIA
 - 4) SUB staffs
 - 5) and all members who have helped in one way or another in making this a successful event.

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