

Zappa book a real libertarian trip

by Peter Stathis

The Real Frank Zappa Book
written by Frank Zappa with Peter
Occhiogrosso
Poseidon Press

Frank Zappa is widely known as that weird man with the thick black moustache above and below his lips.

He creates what most people would refer to as freak music, occasionally mixing orchestral motifs with lyrics about gay cowboys.

He has been composing and performing since the hipp 60s when he formed The Mothers of Invention (whose 1965 debut work, *Freak Out*, has the distinction of being the first double album produced in the rock genre). His solo records have challenged (and helped to stretch) the bounds of mainstream music.

In the process, he has satirized just about every North American cultural icon imaginable (B jungle movies, the dramatic Broadway assembly line, Catholic school girls, airhead groupies, fundamentalist Christians, militant lesbians and cock-sucking record executives), all the while tickling the fancies of those audiophiles who can keep up with him.

Recently, Mr. Zappa has turned his attention to literature. He has written *The Real Frank Zappa Book* to rectify unofficial accounts which claim, among other things, that he has eaten shit on stage. He admits that he does not particularly like books as they make him sleepy, so he got Peter Occhiogrosso, a writer who does like books, to help him.

Among other anecdotes, Zappa mentions his Franco-Italo-Greek-Arab origins, his favourite foods and various childhood nightmares and accidents: the usual fare.

On the unusual side, Zappa's dad used to work as a meteorolo-

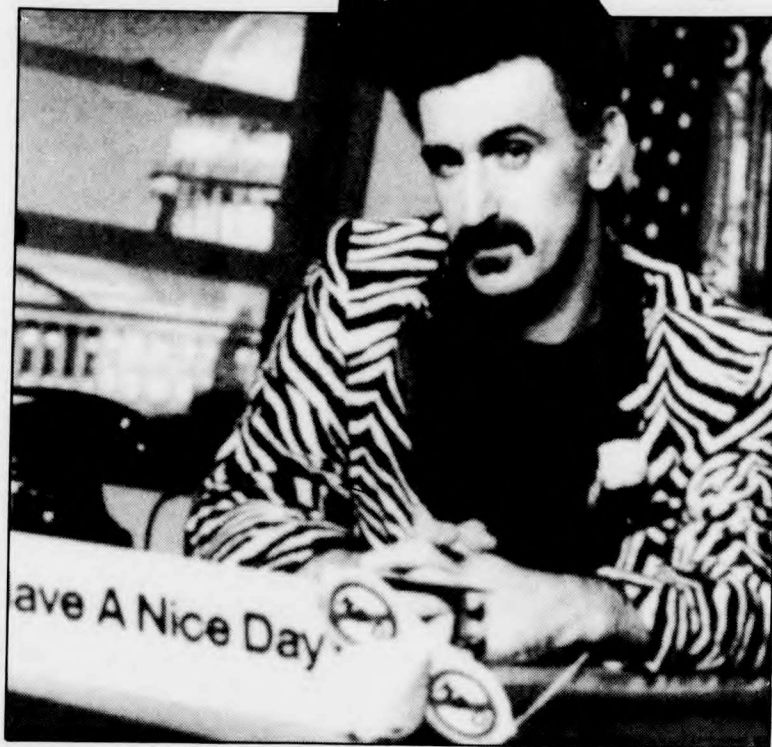
gist during the war and would bring home interesting items from the military lab. Zappa junior eventually learned how to make explosives and set fires in classrooms. After finishing high school, he went to college expressly to meet girls. Incidentally, he found, married, and divorced one, and then got into the music business full-time.

He played drums badly as a teen. His guitar playing was similar. A few years after discovering how to play an instrument, he also learned to record music and moved into his first studio, Studio Z, where he was very hungry for a while. A few years later, in a Hollywood nightclub, Zappa was bumped by a drunken Duke, John Wayne, who smashed Zappa's hat down on top of his head before making a brief presidential election speech.

This amusing narrative goes on page after page, accompanied by hundreds of illustrations; but enough of the plot summary. (Buy the book if you want to know more about the man's toilet etiquette.)

Presently, Frank Zappa is no longer just a weird musician. He was considered a very respectable figure in the 80s, championing artistic freedom of expression against an increasingly-intolerant moral majority. His testimonies on radio and television, especially against religious right censor groups such as the PMRC (Parents Music Resource Centre), have been helpful in deflecting the moral extortion practiced by these pressure groups.

Zappa's scathing rebuttals against censorship have made many people conscious of the insipid erosion of constitutional rights being carried out both in the U.S. and Canada. (Ben Hoffman of Fringe Records will be on trial June 12 in Toronto regarding a Dayglo Abortions album that was



deemed obscene.)

Zappa remains a powerful spokesperson, feared by the conservative establishment, and in turn, left unmolested. He remains outside the censors' sphere of influence, but constantly criticizes its myopic righteousness. When the PMRC "persuaded" many record companies to carry warning stickers on albums, Zappa came

out with his own warning label, stating:

This album contains material which a truly free society would neither fear nor suppress. In some socially retarded areas, religious fanatics and ultra-conservative political organizations violate your constitutional rights by attempting to censor rock and roll albums.

Liar's Poker a safe bet

by Ira Nayman

Liar's Poker
Michael Lewis
W. W. Norton

"I remember almost exactly how I felt and what I saw at Salomon Brothers. I wasn't due at work until 7:00 A. M., but I rose early to walk around Wall Street before going to the office. I had never seen the place before. . . Armies of worried men in suits stormed off the Lexington Avenue subway line and marched down the crooked pavement. For rich people, they didn't look very happy. They seemed serious, at least compared with how I felt. I had only a few jitters that accompany any new beginning. Oddly enough, I didn't really imagine I was going to work, more as if I were going to collect lottery winnings."

The first thing they teach you at writer's school (after show, don't tell and references to kumquats aren't funny) is that it is impossible to make economics entertaining. *Liar's Poker*, by Michael Lewis, proves, for the most part, that this is not true.

The book is a true story of Salomon Brothers, the investment firm that was at the forefront of bond sales in the early 1980's. Lewis was perfectly positioned to document the company's rise and fall: he went through the Salomon training programme just as the company expanded in its first wave of success, and he was a bond trader in London when the company's debt-driven house of cards came tumbling down.

Liar's poker is a game of skill (mainly involving bluffing) based on the serial numbers of American dollar bills. Lewis starts with the story of John Gutfreund, head of Salomon, who challenged his main trader to a single game of liar's poker for one million dollars. The trader, the best player at the company, told Gutfreund that if he

was serious, the stake should be \$10 million. Gutfreund, his boss, backed down.

Liar's poker is a metaphor for Salomon Brothers and, by extension, the whole bond industry. To be a player, you have to have guts, but this can lead to recklessness. The book is filled with examples of both, although it is recklessness which ultimately prevails.

Lewis has a wry writing style which serves him well. Characters like the Human Piranha (who screams a steady stream of profanities at his students) and traders who throw telephones at the heads of underlings need very little editorial comment to make them look ridiculous, and Lewis doesn't overplay them.

His writing can be precious, at times, the humour being a bit too coy. Moreover, there are occasional sexist lapses; while a professional where the most successful people are known as "Big Swinging Dicks" cannot be accused of gender sensitivity, Lewis seems to acquiesce to the sexist attitudes all too easily.

About halfway through the book, Lewis goes into the history of bond sales (a relatively recent

As an alternative to these government-supported programs (designed to keep you docile and ignorant), Barking Pumpkin Records is pleased to provide stimulating digital audio entertainment for those of you who have outgrown the ordinary.

The language and concepts contained herein are guaranteed not to cause eternal torment in the place where the guy with the horns and the pointed stick conducts his business.

This guarantee is as real as the threats of the video fundamentalists who use attacks on rock music in their attempt to transform America into a nation of cheque-mailing nincompoops (in the name of Jesus Christ.)

If there is a hell, its fires wait for them, not us.

Zappa's last chapter trails off into a broken list of recommended reading and assorted facts about the evil-doings of the power elite. However, if there is a lack of traditional cohesion to it, the book does shine on its author's insights.

The Real Frank Zappa Book might mistakenly be called an autobiography. The correction should read, "No folks! That's entertainment." Ultimately even the stories about constitutional subversion smack of a bad Hollywood B movie; and we already know what Zappa has to say about that sort of cultural icon

phenomenon), how it fueled the debt accumulation of the 80's and was partly responsible for the savings and loan crisis of the last few years.

At this point, *Liar's Poker* stops being amusing, partially because of the serious repercussions of what he is describing, but mostly because he is writing about technical matters which are virtually impossible to make amusing. Lewis had built up enough momentum to carry many readers through this dry spell, but those without an interest in arcane money matters may find themselves switching to Wall Street Week.

This would be too bad. Books venerating Wall Street and those who work on it have multiplied faster than rabbits in the past five years; a book that shows the down side of the Greed Decade (pay attention to Lewis describing how he unwittingly screwed his first saving Salomon Brothers several hundred thousand dollars in the process) is a welcome change.

Buy *Liar's Poker* for the humour. Read it to learn how Wall Street really operates.



They talk in a funny language that is almost, but not quite, English. They wear ridiculous clothes. They do the most outrageous things. You might think they are politicians. Actually, they are clowns.

Mump (Michael Kennard) and Smoot (John Turner — maybe they are politicians!) perform a new piece, *Something*, with the able assistance of Wog (Debbie Tidy) and the uncredited assistance of Monk (Campbell Manning). *Something* is something else, by turns silly and surreal, it is totally charming and absolutely hilarious.

Something plays at the Poor Alex Theatre, 296 Brunswick Avenue until May 20. A word of warning: when Smoot tells you to raise your hands and shout, "Umno!" better do it.



Toronto
Art Therapy
Institute

The Toronto Art Therapy Institute and the Institute for Arts and Human Development at the Lesley College Graduate School in Cambridge Mass. have completed arrangements for a co-operative program of studies leading to a masters degree in the expressive arts therapies. Students and graduates of the Toronto Art Therapy Institute 2 year diploma program, are eligible to apply to the Lesley College Masters degree program in the Expressive Art Therapies where their graduate-level training at the Toronto Art Therapy Institute will be given credit as part of the Lesley Masters program.

To complete their Masters degree, students spend two summers at Lesley College for 2 five week periods. If you would like to receive further information about this joint effort, please contact our office and a staff person will be pleased to talk to you.

216 St. Claire West Avenue.

Tel: 924-6221