

## THE RONDO HATTON REPORT VOL VIII

SEPTEMBER 21, 2011

Our *eighth edition* is an opportunity to celebrate **two years** as an imaginary journal in cyberspace - we seem to have settled into a *steady readership* now, but those of you who are not standing up still aren't having as much fun as those who are. **C'mon, y'all**. It's not as if you don't have an opinion, or have been listening to the music all those years without knowing why. We're offering you the opportunity to **express yo'self**, without edits or overdubs, in front of a willing audience. And while we're not in the business of enforced recreation, we'd still like to hear from **YOU**. *You know it's true.*

As always, the texts are supplied as a single *pdf* file. Those wishing to *fondle & fetish* a paper version can download and print texts at their leisure; conservers of the carbon footprint can view online. Thanks to all who **contributed** this time. Content is alphabetic by *author*. Views are the opinion of the writer and the responsibility of the reader. *You is what you am*. Anyone wishing to correspond with a contributor may do so through the 'SUBMIT' page, and messages will be duly forwarded. You are **encouraged** to do so: please let the authors know that you appreciate their efforts - it will make them happy. *Hopla!*

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## 1. SHUT UP AND LISTEN SOME MORE?

Sam Ayore

A few issues back someone called The Grotchy wrote movingly about what he characterized as his (?) quest for the Holy Grail in Zappa's guitar solos, his search for Miles' elusive "blue note" he speculates has taken up residence there, and his thrill at the journey he has "so often taken and yet which changes with every trip."

There are those of us who understand exactly what he means, even if we don't always like to admit it publicly. It helps that someone like Steve Vai can quite openly say of Zappa's music that "When you get it, you really get it, and it changes the quality of your whole life." But we don't need him to say that to understand it. We may like to hear other people say it, but we got it the first time. That's why we're here, meeting each other on this page.

What is it about Zappa's soloing in particular that is so impressive, so fascinating? What makes it so interesting that you can hear it over and over again without ever getting bored? In part, it's the quality of his tone. Few other guitarists can have spent so much time and attention (and money) in getting their sound so exactly the way they wanted it. Whether going for the dirtiest, darkest, smuttiest sound imaginable, or the gentlest, softest, most poignant sound on the planet, Zappa took no prisoners in his desire to create the perfect tone. That alone puts him at the top of his game.

But it's what he did with that perfect tone that really counts. He spoke of his soloing as being a 'conversation' that made use of the rhythms of speech, and as you listen to the way his solos unfold, it's like hearing a speaker develop an argument, a central theme qualified by endlessly relevant sub-clauses. He's painting a picture in sound which not only takes you to places you'd never expected to go, it probes all the possibilities along the way, roughing over and quizzing every rhythm, every harmony, never complacently resorting to a cliché or to flashiness for its own sake.

As a listener, you tend to get things stuck in your mind. At the moment I happen to be fixated on the solo from Bamboozled By Love, the live version on YCDTOSA Vol. 3, so I might as well talk about that while it's hot in my head. I'd not heard it for a while, but it jumped out and bit me on the ear the other day when I had the album on while doing

something else. Partly it's the arresting rhythm of the band, a bionic version the 80's chart hit Owner of a Lonely Heart. But what really hits you is the muscular quality of the tone, and the way in which the solo slowly builds in power while never pausing for breath, the casual insouciance of the raw edge to the sound, and the astonishing blend of menace and compassion he manages to squeeze out of such a short instrumental break. The almost hypnotic insistence of the rhythm section seems to only inspire greater invention from him, the melody constantly back-tracking and inverting as it threads through the tight weave of the wall-of-sound backdrop, the wailing twists and turns always emerging from a new angle or jumping off from an unexpected note. No matter how many times you hear it, you can never really see it coming (even if Steve Vai did once manage to transcribe the Inca Roads solo from memory on the tour bus.)

You could say this or similar things about most of Zappa's solos. Once they start to speak to you, they really do speak, and speak in ways that you can look for in vain elsewhere. Not everyone gets it. Even some fans remain bamboozled by what they see as a boring indulgence. But to the aficionado they remain the beating heart of Zappa's music, the cutting edge of the moment, the point at which composed and composer come together, transfused in a pullulating sonic zygosis.

As The Grotchy says, it's a mental voyage that still delights me every time. He gets it; I get it, very many of us get it – and if you can't I'm sorry 'cos that's all I want to know, I need a little more bamboozlement please...

**BaMBoo-Z-LED**

Although he seemed often strict, with a fiery and unpredictable temper, all of us looked forward to the infrequent weekend visits to our father's place in Aberdeen. As an amateur magician he was very convincing, seemingly able to extract an unending supply of real coins from our ears and our pockets, which he lavishly then bestowed on us as presents. He also made toffee apples, crunchy and juicy, sweet and tart, which we eagerly anticipated and enthusiastically relished. He liked to play music, and from his extensive collection put on a *jugalbandi*, an improvised musical duet, a *raga* featuring Ravi Shankar on sitar, and Ali Akbar Khan on sarod.

We were under strict instructions to drink our tea carefully — not only was it hot enough to severely burn our mouths if carelessly gulped — but more consequentially he had seated us all, perhaps somewhat foolishly, on his ultra-precious rug. He emphatically did not want tea spilled on this rug. He left for the kitchen to roll our apples in the hot toffee and he would, we knew, soon rejoin us once these had been placed to harden and cool on the kitchen windowsill. Inevitably one of us, I remember not who, slopped a sizeable volume of tea onto the rug. We sat aghast and adrenalized, acutely conscious that he would any moment return, and might just then explode. He returned and sat down, all of us fervently hoping that the new and ominously dark patch on his rug would remain outside his ken. We struggled to maintain a consensual silence. To no avail: soon all 5 of us were reduced to helpless alternations of awkward silence, muffled accusations, and, most damagingly, escalating mirth, which, our desperation increasing, we unsuccessfully tried to suppress. But the riffs were my raft: I latched onto the music — whilst the patch spread yet wider, and the steam rose more visibly, somehow amidst all of this, I experienced magically then, my first transport by music, borne aloft by their playing. And, foreshadowing Zappa, humour and edge belonged in this music.

I came to Zappa in my early twenties and to **Freak Out!** only much later, having been introduced initially to **You Are What You Is** and then, spending money as it came to hand, very gradually amassing the whole Zappa catalogue. Despite being musically illiterate, I nonetheless could recognize a definite Eastern influence in the ***Theme from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Movement of Sinister Footwear***, and having later read Zappa speak of his fondness for

Indian music<sup>1</sup>, was gratified to discover Ravi Shankar's name included amongst the multiple influences he'd listed on **Freak Out!**



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<sup>1</sup> Look at Indian musical culture: They don't have too much in the way of progressions, and that's some of the most interesting, beautiful music ever. **POETIC JUSTICE** Frank Zappa  
**Puts Us In Our Place** by Matt Resnicoff (Musician 1991)

At around the same time I discovered Zappa I was introduced to, and developed a parallel interest in **Shakti**, that band comprised of John McLaughlin, L Shankar, Zakir Hussain, and T.H. Vinayakram. And this in turn catalysed an intensified interest in Lakshminarayanan Shankar, whose 1981 ECM release (which featured the inaugural recording of his double violin) **Who's To Know?** I was fortunate enough to chance upon. I did not suspect that the worlds of Zappa and Shankar had at all intersected, but often wished that they had: I imagined Zappa's guitar coupled with Shankar's electric and acoustic violins would be especially noteworthy. Randomly rambling through the streets of Sydney I was astounded to stumble across Shankar's album **Touch Me There** in **Birdland Records**, an out-of-the-way shop I had not even known had existed, much less deliberately planned to reconnoitre. Astounded because this album had Zappa written all over it, and literally too: on the back cover beneath a photograph of a slightly defiant and bemused looking Shankar there occurred in letters fat, red, and glowing **ZAPPA**: not only was Shankar's first solo record occurring on Zappa's label (I think he has the distinct honour of being the only non-Zappa artist to have ever appeared on this label in Frank's lifetime), but Zappa had also produced the album, written all of the lyrics and some of the music, was responsible for the recording arrangements and orchestration, and had even had appeared on the album singing the **Dead Girls of London** (under the moniker of Stucco Homes). **Touch Me There** is a great album: warm & humourous, dynamic & accomplished, and as super-fine as the **Shakti** albums are, on this album there is that characteristic Zappa stamp which deflates the potential pomposity of aura-by-association with 'Eastern' music: in contrast to the overtly 'spiritual' titles on the **Shakti** albums (**Joy**, **Lotus Feet**, **Happiness is Being** etc) we have on the title track the alluring frankness of Jenny Lautrec's vocal, her slightly breathless reiterations of *Touch me there* becoming attractively disturbed. In the *yoga* tradition, *japa* is the repetition of *mantra* (sacred sounds) with the intention of union, and her repetitious commands to *Touch me there* functions like *mantra*, like *japa* It is typical of Zappa to refuse to disassociate from the Bodily — the ironic double entendre of his earlier lyric *discorporate and come with me*<sup>2</sup> is evident.

The ethos of *jugalbandi* inhabits Zappa's music both in its earlier meaning of a musical *duel*, such as in **Stevie's Spanking** (YCDTOSA Vol.4) where Zappa vies Via, and in the more contemporary meaning of a musical *duet*, such as in the intimate entwined bookending

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<sup>2</sup> *Absolutely Free*

Trance-Fusion, in the 555 of **Strat Vindaloo**<sup>3</sup>, and in the inversely symmetric 609 of **Thirteen**<sup>4</sup>.



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<sup>3</sup> **Everything Is Healing Nicely**

<sup>4</sup> **YCTOSA Vol.6 Disc 2**

Through the magic of Pagecraft, **Thirteen** spirals conceptually, circuitously, and fortuitously right back to **Freak Out!** Karlheinz Stockhausen, whose name is yet another one of those annexed to **Freak Out!**, released **Mantra**<sup>5</sup> his composition for 2 pianists, around the same time as Zappa's **Cosmik Debris**. In this fascinating and compelling piece a short musical fragment (the *mantra*, a melody of thirteen pitches) serves as substrate for the whole piece: each of the thirteen sections of the work contains a whole version of the *mantra* with their individual thirteen characteristics themselves subjected to variations. On **Cosmik Debris** Zappa, too, subjects a *mantra* to variations: the song ends with a perversion of the traditional repetition of the *OM SHANTI mantra*, but again this song, both in content and tone, aims to prick at the grandiosity and hypocrisy so often conjoined to the purportedly 'spiritual'. On **Lumpy Gravy** and in its continuum **Civilization Phaze III** we encounter *The Big Note*. The repetition of *OM* — considered the unexcelled seed-vibration, the source-sound and sound-source<sup>6</sup> — is the *japa* of *The Big Note*, and Zappa demonstrates that taking this seriously means that anything — a sock or fuming beaker or even a cartoonishly intoned *OM SHANTI* — is also a valid manifestation of *The Big Note*.

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<sup>5</sup> I can unreservedly recommend the Pestova/Meyer version on Naxos 8.572398 and the version on Accord by Janka and Jürg Wyttenbach

<sup>6</sup> The Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali

for kHz ~ & OM

# The Big Note



Well, I didn't like it. There. At least you know upfront.

It's a pity, because I'd been looking forward to it. And it's not that it's without interest, in parts. We get some juicy tidbits about what life chez Zappa was like in the early days, at least from Pauline's point of view. But that's the problem – it is most definitely Pauline's point of view, and though she seems to have almost total recall of everything she and everyone else was wearing whenever she met Frank, there's not really a great deal about what he was actually thinking about, or why he was doing what he did. Now maybe I'll be in a minority here, but that's mostly what I'd like to know more about.

In part, of course, whatever charm there is to the book stems from the fact that she wasn't like all the others, and perhaps that is why Zappa took her on in the first place, as another freak in the menagerie, albeit a totally straight one. It must have amused Frank no end to have seen her ask Eric Clapton what instrument he played when he introduced her to him.

But these amusing accounts of her social faux-pas, self-deprecating though they may be, do not make up for her complete failure to grasp what it was that Zappa was up to, or what it was that made him really interesting. It's as if she's just wandering through this world of freaks and misfits holding her nose, entertained by what she evidently thinks of as the insanity of it all. And if she's thrilled by the thought of the big time, the whiff of fame and the possibility of an entrée to Hollywood, all the time the only thing that's keeping her there is the fact that (as she repeatedly tells us) Frank was the only man up to that point who had ever really listened to what she'd said. As a keen student of social anthropology, of course that's what he did. But her book does give a good sense of why her self-confessed 'twaddle' might previously have been less than interesting to the rest of mankind.

For example: she recounts a rare visit to a restaurant in the early days with Frank, Gail and a girl from Life magazine at which she again made the 'mistake' of ordering a steak when everyone else was eating hamburgers. She says how 'edgy and tense' the whole meal felt, and that Frank 'hardly spoke' despite the efforts of the others – apart from what she

describes as a story he told in ‘boring detail’ about ‘how vibrations influenced living things, vibrations being the basis of all existence.’

Wow. We only had to wait until just before his death to get a more detailed account of his view of ‘the basis of all existence’, the nature of time and so forth, things about which he obviously had clearly worked-out views, but had apparently not talked about before because ‘no one ever asked me’. No wonder he looked grumpy at the restaurant when his fellow diners were so uninterested in his ‘boring detail.’

The detail that Pauline Butcher is interested in is gossip and chit-chat. We get endless speculation into the perceived machinations going on in Frank and Gail’s orbit, the struggle to be the subject of Frank’s attention (something that Pauline is constantly concerned with). It’s a murky world, out of which the only person who seems to emerge with any kind of dignity is Pamela Zarubica. If you like that kind of thing and believe that Pauline is a reliable witness, you will find it worth the read. If you find that kind of thing tedious, and are looking for a further insight into how FZ’s mind worked, what he concerned himself with and what he thought about – well, no one’s written that book yet. And you’ll be doubly disappointed if you look for it here.



#### 4. CALL ME BRUNO/FULAX

Bruno Farrugia

Ladies and gentlemen,  
The monster,  
Which the peasants in this area call FRUNOBULAX  
(Apparently a very large poodle dog)  
Has just been seen approaching The Power Plant  
Bullets can't stop it  
Rockets can't stop it  
We may have to use NUCLEAR FORCE!  
(Cheepnis, Roxy and Elsewhere, Zappa/Mothers, 1974)

First June 1979

Hello Frank Zappa  
My name is Bruno Farrugia  
and I simply adore your music.

But

in France

I don't find these three L.P. :

- Absolutely Free

-Lumpy Gravy

-Cruising with Ruben and the Jets

So, if you can send me them drop me a line.

Thanks.

My address : Farrugia Bruno

93 rue des Templiers

91360 Epinay sur Orge

France

The Jar is under the bed !

In 1979, I wrote this letter to Frank Zappa.

Since, it remains in my archives.

I have never posted it.

I wonder what would have arrived if I had sent this letter.

Maybe nothing.

But I like to think, that such the butterfly effect, it would have been able to bend the progress of things.

What would Zappa have answered me?

I shall never know.

So, I imagined the answer of Zappa, as a song.

An imaginary song from which only notes are missing.....

Broonooh

He was a French guy (he like garlic)

He lived in Pinee zü Oorgue

But don't' play organ

But don't' play organ

here Broonooh...

here Broonooh...

here Broonooh...

He wrote a letter

and never send it

and never send it

and never send it

here Broonooh...

here Broonooh...

here Broonooh...

He was a French guy (he like garlic)

He lived in Pinee zü Oorgue

But don't' play organ

But don't' play organ

here Broonooh...

here Broonooh...

here Broonooh...

It was a stupid letter

to push aside

It was a stupid letter

to a guy from a group

in America-ca

in America-ca

in America-ca

ca-ca, ca-ca

Channel-flicked\*

Channel-flicked

here Broonooh...

here Broonooh...

here Broonooh...

He was a French guy (he like garlic)

He lived in Pinee zü Oorgue

But don't' play organ

But don't' play organ

here Broonooh...

here Broonooh...

here Broonooh...

Don't be sad, Broonooh,  
if you're not a groupie-pie  
pi-pi, pi-pi

you should be rather write  
to the vegetables  
and the chances are good  
that a vegetable  
will respond to you-hooo

He was a French guy (he like garlic)  
He lived in Pinee zü Oorgue  
But don't' play organ-an-an-an  
But don't' play organ-an-an-an

here Broonooh...  
here Broonooh...  
here Broonooh...

Channel-flicked  
Channel-flicked.....waooooooooooooo.....

\*English translation, on Internet, of "Zappa" in French, (aka: he changed channel, in French : il zappa)

Unlike Italian where " la zappa " is a hoe  
As in the expression : darsi la zappa sui piedi  
(Translation : To damage itself, Give rod to be whipped)

From there, ensues the verb

"zappare" : bring(shoot) down by the foot, work with the pick and the pickaxe to destroy the foundations of a wall, in French: saper.

Let us remind ourselves of the Italian origin of the parents of Frank Zappa.

"I wanted to see the town that my father was born in and I went there and I saw it and then we played the concert and the next thing you know, you have the army and the police; each with their own general telling them what to do; an audience that had brought their own guns; and they're shooting tear gas and tearing up this stadium that we were playing in. We played for an hour and a half in this riot with tear gas in our face and everything else, and when it was all over we went off the stage and we were trapped inside this place. The audience was circling around outside shooting at the police and the police were shooting back. I got a pretty good idea of what my Sicilian roots are like after seeing the town of Partinico - it was pretty bleak." Frank Zappa (September 1984)

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*[Well I turned around and I said*



*and the Northern Lights commenced to glow...]*



Everybody loves the song Jewish Princess. Well, apart from the Anti-Defamation League, of course. It's sharp, funny, rude, and devastatingly accurate – the killer line being “lonely inside” and the implication that behind all the arrogant-looking bluster lurks an unhappy little girl whose Mommy and Daddy don't care. It's a portrait, a piece of social observation. We all know Jewish Princesses, whether or not they are Jewish. It's a socio-psychological type. If you can allow yourself to laugh at it.

Fine Girl, a much less-discussed piece, is quite different. It's the opening track on Tinseltown Rebellion, for one thing. That already sets it up for special attention. Zappa claimed it was a studio piece included to attract potential air-play since the rest of the album clearly wouldn't get it. Fat chance of that.

Like all of his best songs, it's a double- (if not triple-) edged sword. At a cursory listen you might be forgiven for hearing it as an endorsement of stereo-typical male-chauvinist prejudice about women, and either rejoicing or recoiling accordingly. “She go up in de mornin' / She go down in de evenin' ... all de way down.” Hur, hur. But as the lyrics progress they become increasingly absurd (“Silverware too”) and if the suspicion hasn't hit home yet, the verse about fetching the water from the well with a bucket on her head (“She

wouldn't spill a drop / It'd stay on top") is fairly dripping with irony, culminating in the ludicrous "Her head was kind of flat / But her hair covered that." At this point, the game is definitely up.

Unlike most of his 'social commentary' songs which tend to document actual people or events, this song is generic. It's not targeting a type, it's placing the spotlight on a tendency. The exploitation of women by men in domestic environments is pretty much the default setting for every culture on the planet, and remains so except where efforts have been made to roll it back over the last few decades in western-style democracies. Educational opportunities, too, have rarely been equally available to women, a reality nodded to in the line "Didn't need no school / She was built like a mule." The added irony here, of course, is the fact that the speaker himself is exposing his own uneducated attitude in his speech.

So far, so right on. But Zappa himself was far from being an exemplar of women's liberation in his own lifestyle, and by all accounts remained something of an unreconstructed chauvinist both in his domestic arrangements (Gail was apparently responsible for all the cooking and childcare) and in his sexual behaviour. So was he being a hypocrite?

Not necessarily. This is where the third edge of the blade come in. For the finale of the song, Zappa constructs a fabulously multi-layered bull-in-a-barber-shop confection of vocal melody and harmonies, a deranged Bohemian Rhapsody whose sole purpose is to deliver the line "We need some more like dat (in dis kinda town)..." What are we to make of that? Is it just more irony, ramming home the point that this kind of attitude is unacceptable? Or is it, more shrewdly, actually acknowledging that in fact, literal equality between the sexes is not possible because they are not the same, and there is a sense in which we actually do need "some more like that" in this part of town, home of the baritone women.

There's no easy answer, and neither should there be. It's a work of art and as such is allowed to pose questions that it does not necessarily answer. What's not in doubt is that it's a much more complex song, both textually and texturally, than the 'novelty song' Jewish Princess, and should be justly celebrated as such.

## 6. FZ: THE BRAVE ONE

Pamela Goodheart Zarubrica

In the film the BBC made of Frank in his final years he said something to the effect that he would be soon forgotten.

This made me angry at the time. I felt that Frank had not understood the impact he had on the many lives he had touched. His fans have not forgotten him. New ones come all the time. His legacy is forever. His catalogue sold for an enormous sum.

I have known many great jazz musicians who, no matter what they had achieved within their genre, had one eye on the high earnings of the contemporary rock stars of their time. The question is, when does the motivation fit the accolade? Is it enough to be honoured by your peers, have your work taken seriously by classical composers and orchestras – or, as in Frank's case, have a star named after you?

Back then, so many years ago it is now deemed as history, it took a lot to be yourself, to follow your calling. Frank certainly would not have considered himself traditionally good-looking, nor did he excel at sports, all the stuff the other guys did. I know he didn't race a hot car, or hang out on street corners strutting his stuff.

He wasn't the child of famous parents – nor, as he saw it, particularly enlightened ones. He used to tell me how his dad was always cooking tripe. He hated the smell.

He had for a time been married, but was adamant that he never wanted to repeat the experience. It was for him the music always, and only the music. A little action on the side was welcome, and in those days a little action was what he got. He had no money, he wasn't famous, nor did he fit the mould of the traditional hot guy in the early 1960s.

What hasn't been said about Frank is that he was brave. Not fearless – he always worried about the police and being busted again – but brave.

To my mind it took real courage to be so different both personally and professionally, and believe me he wasn't welcomed with open arms – but hey, the present-day composer refused to die, and the world is a better place for his persistence.

