

THE RONDO HATTON REPORT VOL VI, MARCH 21, 2011

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Slimmer pickings this season as our call for **contributions** seems to have fallen on deaf ears: still enough to make good reading, but in a self-sourcing community, *what you do* is what you get. Although we still have a healthy *international readership*, for some reason y'all don't want to **join in**.

There's enough material in the archive already to fill a **small book** - 56 essays in a mix of *six different languages* - but there's a **continental shelf** of pinheads still out there, each one engraved with its own surprising detail. That's why we *keep listening to the music*, of course. Each one of us brings a different insight to the party, and there's always more to be said. **It's not a competition**. We're always looking for someone with a new angle. Why maybe it's you, and *you don't even know it*.

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. LINGUA FRANKA PART II: A LITTLE UGLY ON THE SIDE

Arjun von CAEMMERER

"Do I contradict myself? Very well, then, I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes."

Poem of Walt Whitman, *An American* from *Leaves of Grass* (1856)

"A curiously inconsistent piece, which started out to be a BALLET, but probably didn't make it."

Zappa on *Lumpy Gravy* (1967)

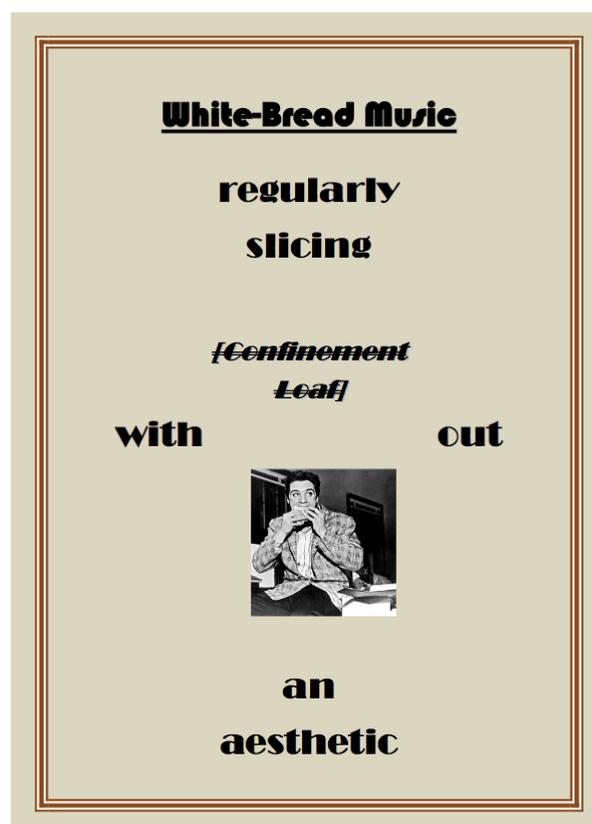
Just like his music, railing consistently against *Beige-Blandish* homogeneity, Zappa's multitudinous conceptiums of *ugly* are complex and prickly, *curiously inconsistent*.

Herewith some Members of this Specious:

1) *Them or Us Ugliness*: This *Ugliness* simply polarizes. Because Other, their ugliness – on whatever aesthetic level – is repugnant, and more ugly than our own uglinesses. From *The Mammy Nuns (Thing Fish)*:

We ugly as sin! (We de MAMMY NUNS!) / We be lookin' good wit de nakkin' on!

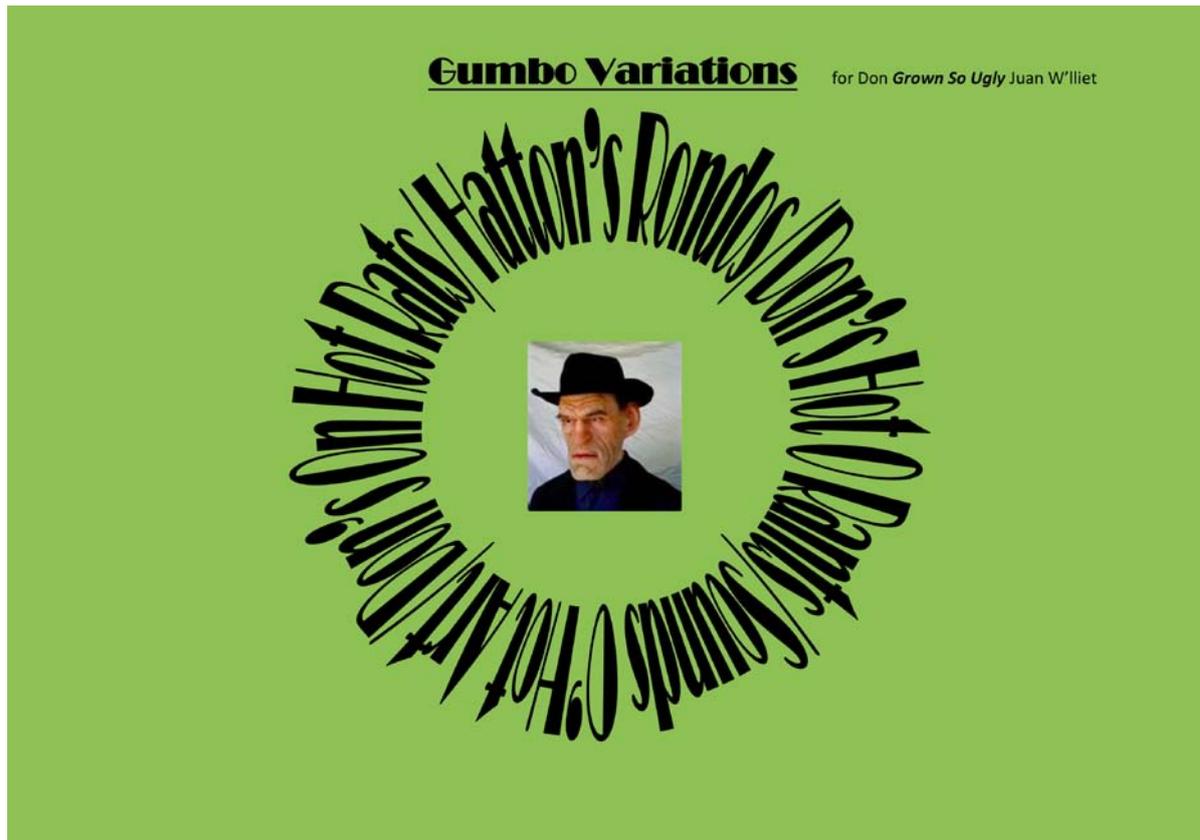
We gots a nasty grin-n-n-n! (We de MAMMY NUNS!) We be lookin' good wit de nakkin' on! (pointing to HARRY) We sho' ain't ugly as him! (We de MAMMY NUNS)



2) *Too Ugly For Show Business*

I have an important message to deliver to all the cute people all over the world. If you're out there and you're cute, maybe you're beautiful. I just want to tell you somethin' – there's more of us UGLY MOTHERFUCKERS than you are, hey-y, so watch out.

Frank Zappa on ***Dance Contest (Tinsel Town Rebellion)***



Ugliness is normal ~ Francesco Zappa **Them or Us** [The Book]

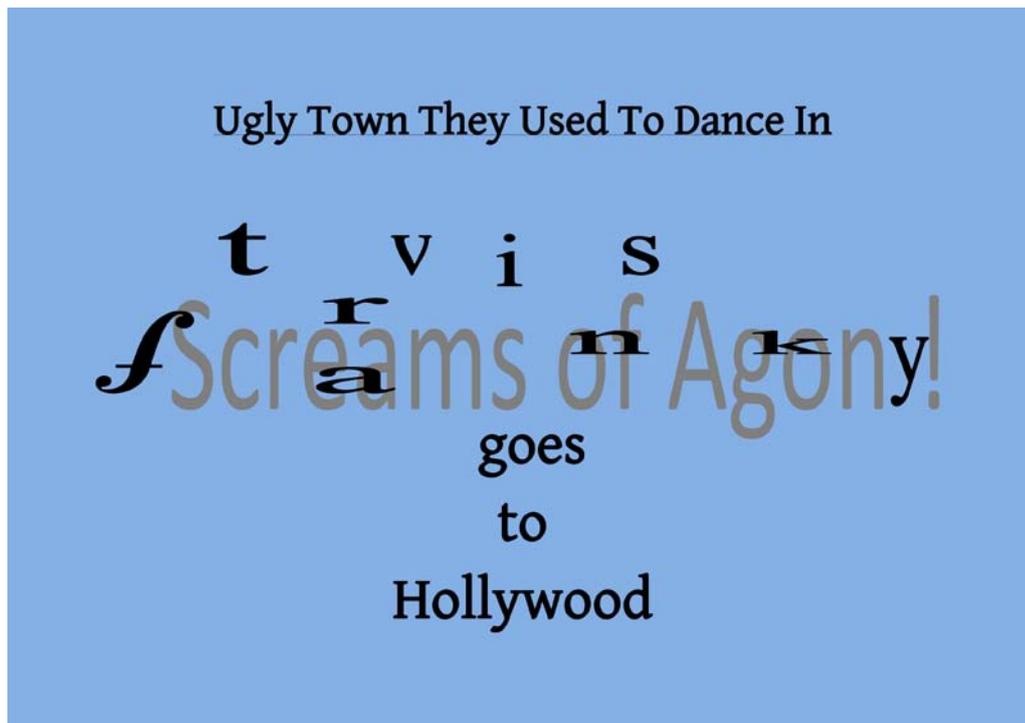
Rondo Hatton (1834-1936), was the actor who was afflicted with facially disfiguring acromegaly. He was consequently much in demand for B grade Hollywood horror movies. Zappa would sometimes introduce himself onstage as Rondo Hatton...

The ugliness Zappa here celebrates is that of *The Real*, and is opposed to the *ugly waxy fake yellow topping*, the conscious cultivation and display of the pizzazz of beauty: *Beauty is a lie*.

3) Ugly Beauty

They didn't like making themselves ugly, but they especially didn't like playing ugly. It's hard getting a musician to play ugly, it contradicts all his training. It's hard to make them understand that all that ugliness taken together can come out sounding quite beautiful.

Zappa and the Mothers: ***Ugly Can Be Beautiful***
from **The Age of Rock, Sounds of the American Cultural Revolution, 1968**

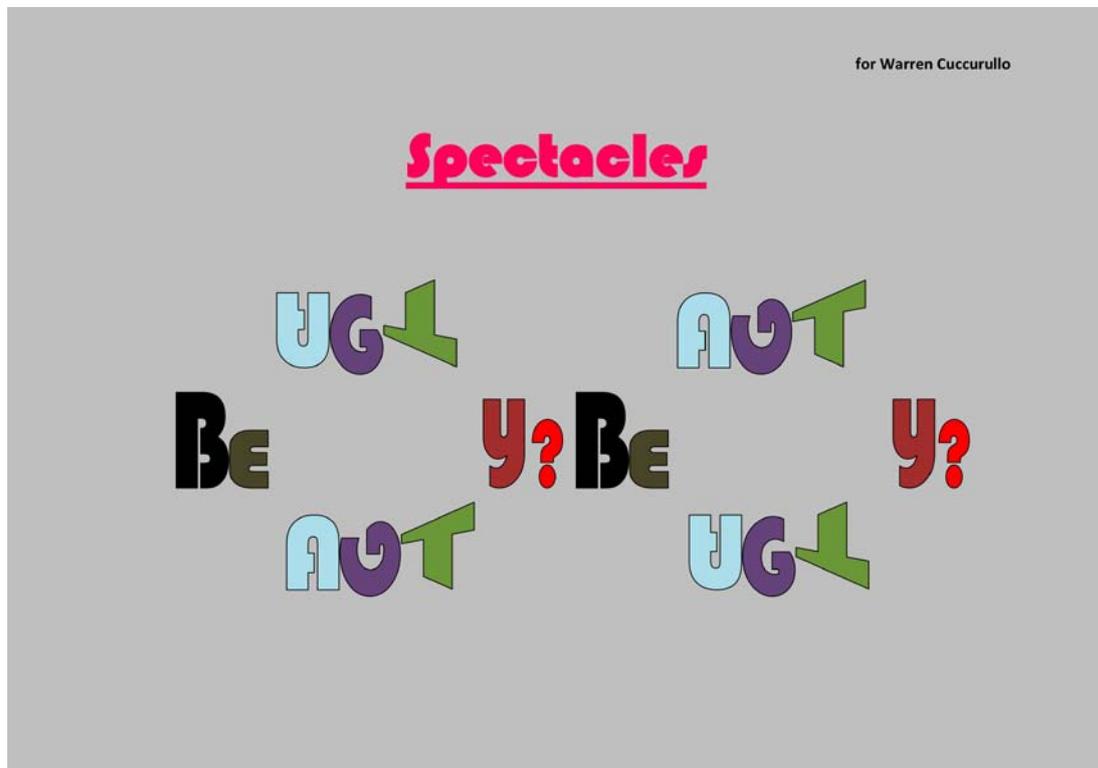


Lingua Franca Part 1 referred to Bartók's **Concerto for Piano and Orchestra #1**, which was initially derided as **unmitigated ugliness** because of its perceived dissonance.

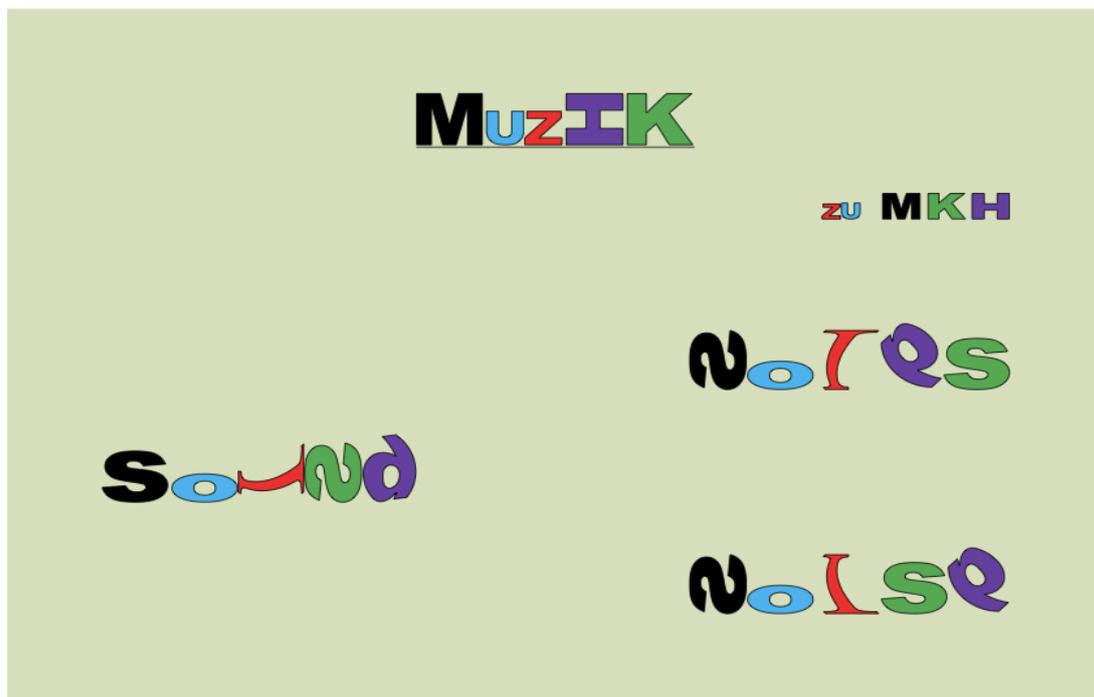
Booker Little's comments resonate: *I can't think in terms of wrong notes - in fact I don't hear any notes as being wrong. It's a matter of knowing how to integrate the notes and, if you must, how to resolve them. Because if you insist that this note or that note is wrong I think you're thinking completely conventionally - technically, and forgetting about emotion. And I don't think anyone would deny that more emotion can be reached and expressed outside of the conventional diatonic way of playing which consists of whole notes and half steps. There's more emotion that can be expressed by the notes that are played flat. Say it's a B flat, but you play it flat and it's not an A and it's not a B flat, it's between them and in places you can employ that and I think it has great values.* (Interview for **Metronome** with Robert Levin, 1961)

Let's be realistic about this, the guitar can be the single most blasphemous device on the face of the earth. That's why I like it. The disgusting stink of a too-loud electric guitar: now that's my idea of a good time --- Frank Zappa

4) **Double You See Ugliness:** Ugliness (and Beauty) live ultimately in the i of the Beholder



And, with **MUSIC**, in the cochlEar apparatus of the Listener...



2. INCUR ODES: When all roads lead to Zappa

Sue GOYNDA

You meet them from time to time. People for who the Zappa virus has become so virulent they hardly listen to anything else anymore. Or if they do, they're only reminded how right they were not to do so, so great the satisfaction they feel in listening to the works of The Master, no matter how many times they've heard it. They're usually male, and mostly of a 'real time' generation. And usually their children all have the same story: "All Dad ever does is listen to Zappa – don't talk to him about it, it'll only encourage him..."

Sad cases? But they're not completely mad, either. If listening to music is also a process of seeing the patterns, like everything else, then once you've heard enough music over a sufficient number of years, there's not a lot more to be heard. There's only so much reggae you can take. Or opera. Or almost anything else. And anything announcing itself as a particular type of music, is already a self-classifying, self-limiting perspective on what music is or ought to be – a joyful probing and expression, a questioning and a celebration.

So if you've done the math and studied the forms, where do you go to get your thrill? You need the company of someone who's thinking outside the box. As with any other art, the names that remain from the past (whether classical or 'modern') are generally those whose work is associated with innovation – people who broke the mold. These are the artists who have challenged existing perceptions through their work, and whether by the power of invention or sheer necessity have enabled us to see the world differently ("Stay ahead of your time and behind with the rent" was Dorothy Parker's formula). By breaking down the barriers to the present that habit always creates – or 'tradition', as it soon becomes – they offer a path to a fresh and more immediate take on whatever we mean by reality, and bring us closer to the edge of consciousness which is always chaos and uncertainty.

So what's all this got to do with Zappa, or those who obsess over his work? It's not as if he's the only person who's innovated, questioned or changed perceptions in music. Indeed, very few people in mainstream musical culture

actually recognize that he has done so at all. But that's largely because they are in the mainstream, the province of cultural nation-states who haven't realized that their time in the sun is over.

Zappa may not be totally unique. His talent is, however, extremely rare. What he has done is to take the elements available to him in his time (still our time, after all), and find their common thread – not just in music but in all forms of culture, high and low art. That's what his often-quoted slogan Anything Anyplace Anytime For No Reason At All is all about. Once you see through the forms, then anything can become anything else, it's just a question of seeing the link. It's not about eclecticism. It's about understanding that everything contains the seeds of everything else, if only we knew it.

The joy of Zappa's music is its refusal to indulge the listener in the same old stuff. In fact, it's a master class in staying ahead of the curve. So if that's your thrill, most everything else can start to seem very stale. Zappa may not be innovative in the way of 'classical' composers associated with new forms of music. But in rising above form itself, he shows us there's an ode in anything. And that's about as good as it gets.



3. ONE SHOT DEAL: The Sandy Road (to the Umbrella Stand)

Simon PRENTIS

I've always liked the song 'It Just Might Be A One Shot Deal'. Not that I've ever really understood most of it. But the instruction about *diggin' it while it's happening* always seems to cut right to the chase of FZ's twisted zennery, as does the observation that *you can be scared when it gets too real*, a preview of the mindset that afflicts the subject of Yo Mama, whose only reward for playing the game is to *get beat*.

With One Shot Deal, however, Zappa's friendly advice comes on the back of his unfailingly acute insight into the mind of a creep, the kind of person who will otherwise end up unnoticed in Managua despite his or her best intentions, the kind of person that FZ himself (once) was, the kind of person who's starting to get worried, ain't going out no more, and is thoroughly confused by what be gwine on because the label has come off and the gig is up. These are the 'other people' that Zappa speaks most strongly to, encouraging them to stand up and be what they is, not what society (aka Mom & Dad, your priest, some guy on television) would like them to be. Because at the cutting edge of fear, there's only two ways to jump – in or out. Most people opt for in, thinking they might not get back to where the rest of them are (the others, the others, just like you), but for the rest of us... well, we know by now how surprised (and delighted) you might be at what you find out when you go.

As for the rest of the song, with its frogs, satchels, rugs and umbrella stands (not to mention forests, dirt, bags and rants) I don't think anyone has got to the bottom of it yet. Assuming there is one to be found beyond FZ's own personal amusement. In my sometime role as Semantic Scrutinizer, I did get to quiz him about it once, but his response was cryptic: 1. *Frog is an isotope* (no further information was forthcoming when I pressed him); 2. *No relation to Frogs With Dirty Little Lips*; 3. *Possible connection with Toads of the Short Forest*; and 4. In response to my query "if none of the above, then why the satchel, sand and the need to stake out the umbrella stand?" his reply was: "See Mark Twain's footnote and translation of *Struwwelpeter*". Hah?



I remembered being terrified by the tales in *Struwwelpeter* as a young boy, but knew nothing about Mark Twain having done a translation of it, let alone providing a footnote. In those dark pre-internet days, I did my best in the local library, but could not find either the translation or the footnote in question, and so Zappa's note slumbered on unnoticed in my files. Recently though, a friend asked me about the word 'rant' at the end of the song (about which I also have no answer). This prompted me to revisit my notes and rediscover the above, which stimulated me in turn to go onto the net and find the aforesaid footnote, which through the magic of cyberspace duly appeared:

** My child, never use an expression like that. It is utterly unprincipled and outrageous to say **ate** when you mean **eat**, and you must never do it except when crowded for a rhyme. As you grow up you will find that poetry is a sandy road to travel, and the only way to pull through at all is to lay your grammar down and take hold with both hands.*

OMG, as they say. Here is a man who claimed not to read books not only referencing Mark Twain (one of the few people whose sharp, witty and acerbic observations on the state of humanity match those of Zappa himself) but quoting an arcane footnote in an obscure work as a clue to understanding the lyrics to an otherwise impenetrable song. Not that it necessarily 'explains' it: it's hard to believe that the song is merely an elaborate metaphor for the difficulty of disciplining one's imagination (the forest growing up from the dirt on the floor?) to the point where it can be shoe-horned into whatever shape the format demands (in this case the music – Zappa claimed to mostly write his lyrics to pre-existing music) so that something can be salvaged from the 'mile of sand'. Does the umbrella stand arise simply from the need to find a phrase to rhyme with 'hand' and 'sand', for example?

Probably not. Another equally plausible explanation is that FZ was just sending me off on a wild goose chase because it amused him. But whether or not, in citing Mark Twain's footnote he is also commenting obliquely on his own penchant for doing creative damage to English grammar in the service of rhyme, poetry, or simply making a more forceful point. The passage Twain's footnote refers to occurs in *The Story of Ugly Frederick*, a tale about a nasty little boy who beats his dog until the poor creature turns and bites him, the relevant line occurring in the following verse:

*And all this time the dog below
Sings praises soft and sweet and low
O'er Fred'ricks dinner waiting here
For Fred'rick (or for Fred'rick's heir)
The dog's his heir, and this estate
That dog inherits, or will ate.**

[If you hear echoes of Patricia the dog in Donald Roller Wilson's work in this, that's possibly because you're unhealthily obsessive, and should immediately self-medicate by writing it up for the next issue of The Rcondition...]

The 'ate' grates because it should be 'eat', but in transgressing the rules Twain (and Zappa)'s real point in the footnote is that not only is it OK to do violence to the language when you have to, it's in the nature of such distortions to provide a new route through to meaning, supplying a healthy – even necessary – jolt to a consciousness always in danger of being lulled to sleep by cliché. As we all know, Zappa's work is replete with such deliberate ungrammatical formulations:

You are what you is

If you play the game you will get beat

I bet you'd do the same if they was you

These and the many other examples are all 'wrong' ("spelt r-o-n-g" as Zappa used to say...), but they have the effect of bringing you up short, forcing you to rethink the phrase – like a slap in the face. It's also an inverted comment about the irrational nature of English (and any other) grammar in the first place, and the fact that you have to 'play the game' by mastering such absurdities in order to be understood. And not least, it's also a nod to 'street' language, a recognition that the cutting edge of culture is not generally to be found in the groves of academe, but amid the 'five in every four' reduced to watching rats go 'cross the floor because their uncle don't own a store...

Once again, what seemed to be just a fun little ditty with a classy pedal-steel solo turns out to hold hidden depths, but then it all springs from the same DNA. Isotope or otherwise, just keep an eye on that froggy as he jump around on the sandy road, and don't forget to have a good time while it's happening. You never know how long you got!

4. "500 WORDS ON FRANK"

Pamela Goodheart ZARUBICA

I have until now never written about my relationship with Frank Zappa.

Contrary to a lot of information published even by the man himself, there was a relationship of great significance. I was with him when he wrote *Who Are The Brain Police*, indeed I was the subject of some of his earlier works and my voice has appeared on many of the earlier albums.

While I have not spoken to many people about my history, when I do, they constantly urge me to tell the stories. So much time has passed that I now realise it is indeed history, and it is my intention to share a clear and honest view from my own perspective.

When Frank and I were together, horoscopes did not really exist for us. It was early days for all that stuff. I clearly remember a day when we sat reading Virgo and Sagittarius, and were concerned that this difference might impact negatively on our friendship.

It could be said that I knew a different Frank than the one admired by all his fans. I knew Frank before he made it, when he was shunned by the establishment, when he couldn't get a gig at the Whiskey or the Trip because he had said 'fuck' on stage.

I knew Frank before the record deal. I remember talking with Capt Beefheart on the phone the night Frank wrote *Who Are The Brain Police*. "I want you to talk to my friend Don," he'd said. "He's a great artist. He calls himself Capt Beefheart". I was cleaning Frank's bathtub at the time. Not a pretty sight. He lived in this tiny place up these tall stairs in a Mexican neighbourhood, Echo Park. As we walked up the stairs I heard for the first time someone call out his given name: 'Beardo Wierdo'.



Those were tough times. Money was scarce to say the least. We might scrape together a few bucks to buy gasoline for his orange station wagon and somehow he found five dollars to pay me for the cleaning I had done, but if we had money left over to share one of those giant chocolate-drop cookies from Greenblatt's it was a big deal.



Frank was kind and caring, always driven as a composer, different from the Hollywood crowd.

I remember arriving at a party up the road from my house and Kirkwood to find him lying on the floor. "I'm glad you're here", he said. We escaped and went to have fruit pies at his favourite drive-in. We spent a lot of time there in his car listening to the radio.

He turned me on to squid. I was afraid to try it even though I came from a Serbian background and had always loved seafood. He convinced me to have a go, and I never looked back. We talked that night about guitars, and went later to his favourite shop. He introduced me to a love of the instrument in all its contexts. I'm one of the few women I know who loves guitar porn, not that I know that much, I really don't, but I always have an understandable reference book nearby.

One night we went to see Howling Wolf in a small blues club. It wasn't really crowded, but he was amazing.

Recently I went to a bit of the Frank Zappa retrospective at the Roundhouse. I wanted to see the question and answer session with Gail and Dweezil. It was disappointing that Ian couldn't make it. Most of the questions – in fact if I remember correctly, all of them – came from men. They were mostly about the music. When the organiser of the event asked the people on stage what feelings the evening evoked for them, the question was never answered. For myself I cannot discuss issues and reissues, live concert footage versus recording quality.

The Frank and I knew was the world's greatest guitar player, father, son and a composer of great insight, humour, wisdom and true genius, but ultimately the Frank that I knew was a friend.

Those wanting to know more about what's got into me can visit:

www.pamelagoodheartzarubica.com