



The Malcolm Garrett Collection Playlist #6

Ugly Love

Compiled in 2016

"No way to avoid that trouble coming every day." Frank Zappa

In his 1989 autobiography (*The Real Frank Zappa Book*) Zappa wrote about a failed proposal he'd put forward to make available on demand all of the music in record companies' back catalogues via the cable TV channels, for a monthly subscription. Even by the time this idea had been touted around numerous record and cable companies, then abandoned as a commercial proposition, and subsequently written about as a kind of footnote in this book, it was still a full ten years before Apple launched iTunes, and even more before Spotify made the idea an internet reality.

I can't help reaching the conclusion that many other radical West Coast minds up in Silicon Valley (stand up Stewart Brand, Steve Jobs, Larry Page et al) have been alive to the visionary speculations from this original counter-culture radical down the coast in LA's Laurel Canyon.

It all adds fuel to the notion that the digital revolution was in part borne of a commercial revisiting of the hippy ideals of the 60s. Both Frank Zappa and Steve Jobs undoubtedly wanted to "change the world", but making comparisons about how they each went about it is a topic for another separate discussion of social anthropology, not this one.

So this collection is about an idealist future vision then? Well, not quite. It is idealist, sort of, but is more concerned with what influenced Zappa rather than how influential he was himself. No single person is truly individually iconoclastic. We all can be found, and find ourselves, somewhere in a cosmic flow from back then to way over there. We are influenced and we influence. Frank Zappa, a prolific composer and musician, and eloquent spokesperson for a certain generation, is many different things to many different people, and no one person's view shows the complete picture.

This is but one picture of Frank Zappa, one which adds depth to an already complex image. It is a collection of love songs, sort of, written and recorded by Zappa and his band The Mothers of Invention between about 1966 and 1970. Sometimes they are heard tucked away amongst more radical jazz and classical tinged rock instrumentals, but "in a last ditch attempt to get their cruddy music on the radio" The Mothers' fourth album *Cruising With Ruben & The Jets* is wholly devoted to such teenage-oriented 'trash'.

Zappa cynically suggests that love is at best a questionable subject for any song, yet some of this selection comes dangerously close to confirming a sentimentality that we otherwise wouldn't expect from him. Soon after many of these were recorded Frank Zappa disbanded The Mothers, for musical reasons which many say were never adequately explained. No sentimentality there then.

Here, then, is Frank's twisted take on love, an homage to the 'doo-wop' songs that he grew up on, with one or two other West Coast stories thrown in for good measure. I'll shut up now and let The Mothers' songs sing for themselves.

"Don't forget to register to vote" Frank Zappa.

Notes

In an effort to please existing Frank Zappa fans as well as new listeners I've endeavoured to locate alternate takes and hard to find versions for this collection, and the songs I've included from *Cruising With Ruben & The Jets* are all the original vinyl mixes, rather than the ones Zappa himself somewhat controversially remixed for the official CD release.

Penis Dimensions

Some of the most radical musicians of recent times have adopted sexual euphemisms as their names: the Sex Pistols and Throbbing Gristle are euphemisms for penis, whilst both The Loving Spoonful and 10cc refer to the amount of semen in the average male ejaculation. I mention it here as I hadn't realised until recently, that Captain Beefheart, the name adopted by Don Van Vliet, Zappa's long time musical collaborator, was a reference to the male appendage too. (Sadly I wasn't able to include Zappa's *Willie The Pimp* with vocals by Beefheart in this collection).

Zappa was not able to avoid censorship of his own band name though. 'Mothers' was a colloquial abbreviation of 'Motherfuckers' and a term commonly used in USA to describe musicians at the top of their craft. The Mothers were, by necessity, obliged to modify this name to the less challenging Mothers of Invention upon release of their first album *Freak Out!*.

This playlist was first posted on Matt Cooper-Wright's 'Internet Music Programme' in 2016.