



**"Jazz from Hell"
Frank Zappa
Barking Pumpkin
Records
★★★★**

To say that Frank Zappa is one of the strangest figures in American music would be an understatement. For 20 years, he has been making innovative music that defies both classification and mass consumption.

Strong social criticism and bizarre music have been Zappa's specialties since he released his first album, "Freak Out," in 1966. Zappa's music often contains some of the most satirical and offensive lyrics in the history of rock 'n' roll. He is not afraid to tackle any issue and will not be subtle in his attacks. His

outspokenness has made him one of the music industry's worst enemies and his participation in last year's "Porn Rock" hearings did not earn him many new friends.

As a musical innovator, Zappa has few equals. He combines rock, blues, jazz and avant-garde styles to achieve a unique blend of music. Aside from albums of rock music, Zappa has released musicals, operas, concertos and symphonies that have achieved critical, if not financial success.

"Jazz from Hell" is a fully instrumental synthesis of jazz, avant-garde and space age music. Except for one song, the entire album is performed on the Synclavier, a high-tech combination of synthesizer and computer. The Synclavier, the most advanced instrument of its kind, has unlimited possibilities. It can produce almost any sound or combination of sounds imaginable by either producing the sound through electronic means or by "sampling" sounds from other sources and reproducing them in various fashions. It can be played like a keyboard or programmed like a computer. You don't have to be a

musician to play a Synclavier, you just need to know how to type.

Zappa took music of different jazz styles, added some of his own ideas and ran everything through the Synclavier to get the music on "Jazz from Hell." It's easy to hear a be-bop jazz influence on "Night School," the first track on the album. It's harder to place specific styles but the rhythms of jazz infest each track.

Newer musical styles can be heard on "The Beltway Bandits" and "Damp Ankles." Zappa uses a minimalist style similar to the works of Philip Glass for "The Beltway Bandits." "Damp Ankles" is more mechanical and sounds like a European industrial piece. The title track has a unique rhythmical style that's vaguely African.

"St. Etienne" is the only song performed by a band. Guitarists Steve Vai and Ray White, keyboardists Tommy Mars and Bobby Martin, bassist Scott Thunes, percussionist Ed Mann and drummer Chad Wackerman join Zappa for this hot little number. After hearing Zappa's guitar work on "St. Etienne," you might wish he had gotten away from the Synclavier for more of the album.

Zappa is a great musician and composer, and the Synclavier is a fantastic instrument that needs to be exploited, but there is a major problem with "Jazz from Hell." The Synclavier is so much a computer that it's hard to tell if the incredibly fast riffs on "G-Spot Tornado" and "Massaggio Galore" are the product of Zappa or the machine. With a machine like the

Synclavier, a musician could become obsolete.
—Review by Karl
Pallmeyer



**"Havin' a Bad Day"
Dweezil Zappa
Barking Pumpkin
Records
★★**

If Dweezil Zappa's father had released "Havin' a Bad Day," you might think the album was a joke — a parody of heavy metal music. But Dweezil seems to take himself too seriously to invite a laugh at the music he's making.

Dweezil's father, Frank Zappa, has made some of the most strange and interesting music in rock 'n' roll history. It comes as no surprise that other members of the Zappa family try their hand at making music. In 1982, Moon Unit Zappa and her father released "Valley Girl." The song was a smash hit but few people got the joke.

"Havin' a Bad Day" is Dweezil's first album. The entire Zappa family participated in some fashion — father Frank produced, and mother Gail, sisters Moon and Diva, and brother Ahmet Rodan provide vocals. Drummer Chad Wackerman and bassist Scott Thunes, who have played with Frank for several years, provide the rhythm section for the album.

The first two songs on the album, the title track

and "Blonde Hair, Brown Nose," are almost too typical examples of heavy metal garbage. Dweezil tries to pattern his guitar work after Eddie Van Halen and his vocals after David Lee Roth. At least the lyrics to "Blonde Hair, Brown Nose" have a slight satirical flavor.

"You Can't Ruin Me" is a little slower, a little better and features Moon on lead vocals. There is a slight hint of teenage rebellion in the lyrics but Moon's voice isn't strong enough to give the song much of a bite. "Let's Talk About It," the other song that features Moon on lead vocals, combines a childlike innocence with a social conscience.

The two instrumental numbers, "The Pirate Song" and "Electric Hoedown," show that Dweezil has a little bit of talent. "The Pirate Song" has some hot guitar licks that would be more interesting if Dweezil wasn't copying Van Halen. "Electric Hoedown" is a nice country synthesizer piece.

Comedian Bob Goldthwait is guest vocalist on "I Want a Yacht." Backing vocals are provided by Ahmet Rodan Zappa, Gail Zappa, Diva Zappa, Kathryn Thyne and Bob Rice, a.k.a. Yachtly Crue.

The best song on the album is "I Feel Like I Wanna Cry." Dweezil mellows out and plays some simple guitar licks. If Dweezil would stop banging his head and start playing more stuff like this he may have a future.

"Havin' a Bad Day" shows that Dweezil may have inherited some of his father's talents but doesn't know what to do with them.

—Review by Karl
Pallmeyer

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