

**Was He Right? A Look Back at Frank Zappa's 1984 Keynote Address
to the American Society of University Composers**

Samuel J. Hamm Jr., PhD, Assistant Professor of Music
Rocky Mountain College, Billings, MT

Presented at the 2009 Meeting of the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the College Music Society

ABSTRACT

Frank Zappa (1940-1993) remains a controversial figure in American music. A self-taught composer, his works defied simple stylistic categorization and exhibited musical features from both concert and popular traditions. As a result, Zappa developed a devoted base of fans from a broad spectrum of backgrounds and interests. His detractors were equally distributed. For many listeners of popular music, his music was excessively complicated and experimental. At the same time, Zappa was not taken seriously by many in the world of concert music due to his work in the world of popular music. Much of the controversy surrounding Zappa, however, came not from his music, but from his words. Whether in song lyrics, interviews, essays, or speeches, Zappa's words rarely failed to elicit extreme responses. One of the most famous, or perhaps infamous, examples is his 1984 keynote address to the national conference of the American Society of University Composers, held at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. In his comments Zappa lambasted the very notion of composers in academe, ridiculed the assembled audience, and disparaged the overall state of contemporary music. A quarter-century has now passed since those remarks, and time provides perspective to evaluate the question, "Was he right?"

Introduction

Dr. Thomas Wells, current president of Society of Composers, Incorporated (SCI), takes responsibility for inviting Frank Zappa to speak at the 1984 national conference of the American Society of University Composers (ASUC). According to Wells, in an email conversation that I had with him:

It was my idea to bring Zappa in the first place. I was reading an article in some magazine on the way to the 1983 ASUC National in Baton Rouge when it struck me.

The article Dr. Wells was reading could have been from any number of sources: during 1982 and 1983, there were articles on Zappa in the following periodic publications: *Downbeat*, *Guitar Player*, *Guitar World*, *High Times*, *JoyStik*, *Mix*, *Musician*, *Ritz*. The diversity of this list illustrates the extent to which the persona of Zappa, as well as his music and ideas, were permeating the consciousness of multiple audiences.

Although Zappa primarily earned his fame from his work in rock-and-roll, his musical interests were broad, running the gamut from blues to experimental jazz to doo-wop to Edgard Varèse. He was composing and receiving performances of concert music before finishing high school, and his early rock-and-roll albums often contained compositions of musique concrete. He consistently challenged and spoofed musical styles such as psychedelica and disco whose popular appeal was rapidly attained and also rapidly evaporated: Zappa's disdain for fads was extreme. Less than two years before his 1984 ASUC address, Zappa had his highest charting single, "Valley Girl", which reached #32 on the Billboard charts and was nominated for a Grammy award.

ASUC had its origin in the increasing numbers of composers who were attaining positions in American colleges and universities during the 1960s, as described on the SCI website:

SCI was founded in 1966 as the American Society of University Composers to further the cause of contemporary American music by providing opportunities for performing, recording, and publishing members' works. The name ASUC was later changed to SCI to reflect the demography of our organization, which today comprises around 1,200 members, in- and out of academe.

Inviting a rock-and-roll musician, albeit one with long-running interests in the avant-garde and who also composed concert music, to speak at a conference of academic composers, was an inventive and adventurous move by Dr. Wells.

The Address

As adventurous as Zappa was with his music, he also sought to achieve maximum expressive effect with his words. His song lyrics could be obscure or intellectual while laced with what many consider to be adolescent humor: for instance, Zappa's song "Punky's Whips" includes both of the phrases "insolent pouting rictus" and "maybe he'd like to yank my crank". Examples similar to this one exist throughout his songs. In addition, throughout his career Zappa was highly sought as a subject for interviews by a variety of media, because it was known that he could be simultaneously insightful, challenging, shocking, satirical, or absurd. He was respected enough as a voice of the recording industry to be called to testify before a committee of the United States Senate in 1985 regarding censorship of rock lyrics.

To fairly consider the words of Zappa, then, care must be taken to identify which of his statements are forthright and direct, and which contain satire or irony. Of course, satire and irony are only as effective as they are related to truth. As such, Zappa imbues his language with multiple layers of reference and meaning when it may initially appear to be casual or irreverent.

As is customary for speakers who are visiting a group with whom they hold no affiliation, Zappa opened his 1984 ASUC address by introducing himself and by acknowledging his audience:

I am occasionally asked to attend forums and symposia on musical matters. I am usually 'booked in as a novelty act', or 'token eccentric' to liven things up for 'the serious people'. This event is no exception. I do not belong to your organization. I know nothing about it. I am not even interested in it, and yet, a request has been made for me to give what purports to be 'THE KEYNOTE SPEECH'. Before I go on, let me warn you that I talk dirty, and that I will say things you will neither enjoy or agree with. I am sure you won't feel threatened, since I am a mere buffoon, and you are all SERIOUS AMERICAN COMPOSERS.

Upon disposing of the pleasantries, Zappa poses the question, "Is new music relevant in an industrial society?" He soon provides his answer: "The general consensus seems to be that music by living composers is not only irrelevant, but genuinely obnoxious to a society which concerns itself primarily with the consumption of disposable goods." The commentary, then, is not upon the inherent value of new music as a contribution to the art form or continuance of a tradition, but instead how it is received by audiences that would be willing to pay for it. This becomes the foundation for Zappa's subsequent assertion, that composers in academe are financially supported through mechanisms other than revenues, and are thus disconnected from the market motivations that would lead to wider dissemination of their work:

There is really no way a composer will ever convince a REAL AMERICAN PERSON that there is a need for his services. The older ones know this, but continue to teach their ancient nonsense anyway. Not because it is a historical necessity, not because they believe in the 'ancient nonsense' as an aesthetic ideal, not because they are 'DRIVEN' . . . simply because it CAN be sort of an OKAY JOB (if you don't mind 'wearing the brown lipstick' after those meetings with the board regents).

Besides the scatological satire in the "brown lipstick" reference, Zappa also took aim at what he saw as another problem with academic composers: that they exist primarily to perpetuate themselves. He compares academic composers to lawyers in this regard, saying that they both "[complicate] everything in daily life to the point where it is impossible to function without their services." In the case of academic composers, he is suggesting that the music so complicated, and so devoid of clarity, that the composers had created a place for themselves in academe due to the need to explain their own work.

Zappa then returns to the criticism of market-driven music, citing it as a problem in itself, stating that the market caters to the lowest common denominator. He cites a hypothetical teenager, Debbie, as an example, and uses her as the subject for another question:

As a SERIOUS AMERICAN COMPOSER, should DEBBIE really concern you? Because DEBBIE prefers only short songs with lyrics about boy-girl situations sung by persons of indeterminate sex, wearing S & M clothing, and because there is LARGE MONEY INVOLVED, the major record companies, which, a few years ago, occasionally risked investment in recording of new works, have all but shut down their 'classical divisions' and seldom record 'new music'. The small labels that do release it have wretched distribution. Some have wretched accounting procedures. They might release your recording, but you won't get paid.

It is Zappa's suggestion, then, that academic composers do not produce a product that is viable for the market, and thus have manufactured other means of supporting themselves that does not contribute to the creation of meaningful music.

The address then drifts a bit, touching on the subjects of patronage, the notion of music as temporal decoration, and what he sees as the negative influence of musicians' unions. He then returns to a comparison of pop music and what he calls "serious music", and condemns both:

In order for the lowliest piece of musical trash to get played on the radio, it too must adhere to an iron-clad set of structural and stylistic regulations, in their way EVEN MORE RIGOROUS AND CONFINING THAN THE ONES CELEBRATED IN YOUR UNIVERSITIES ON A DAILY BASIS . . . and they have to tell their miserable little stories in three minutes or less. Sad and fake as they are, the GRAMMY AWARDS seem as perfectly suited to be the celebration of this sort of 'craftsmanship' as the sad, fake Fromms and Pulitzers craved by many of the denizens of this convention.

Zappa has now set himself up for his final assault, and chastises academic composers for being too careful at playing by the rules that they have constructed for themselves, creating job security in an elaborate ruse to extract money from entities such as universities and government grants. In such a delicate system, Zappa contends, there is excessive risk in stepping outside of accepted boundaries; hence, everything produced within the boundaries becomes circular, self-referential, stale, and ultimately meaningless. And if the existence of the academic composer is meaningless?

Start planning now, so everything will be ready in time for the next convention. OF COURSE YOU CAN DO IT! Change the name of your organization from 'A.S.U.C.' to 'WE SUCK', steal some cyanide from the chemistry department, put it in the punch bowl at the reception with some of that 'white wine' artistic people really go for, and BITE THE BIG ONE.

Zappa closes by returning to the theme of self-perpetuation, and suggests that there is a danger in teaching within such a system: that the student becomes more effective within the system than the teacher and ultimately usurps the rewards of success:

The least you can do is tell your students: "DON'T DO IT! STOP THIS MADNESS! DON'T WRITE MUSIC!" If you don't . . . the little sonofabitch might grow up with the ability to kiss more ass than you, have a longer, more dramatic neck-scarf, write music more baffling and insipid than your own, and BINGO! There goes your tenure.

It is my belief that much of what Zappa said was sarcastic and satirical bluster, but that there was a message to be unearthed when reading between the lines, and inferring ideas from some things left unsaid. However, if Zappa's words are taken literally, the address was blisteringly negative and critical.

Reactions and Recollections

Since the address by Zappa predates my involvement with ASUC/SCI, I asked some of my friends and colleagues in the organization who were present at the 1984 address to share their recollections. The responses were diverse.

David Ward-Steinman wrote to me in an email:

The consensus was that he came across as arrogant and rude, and instead of staying to hear any of the concerts, left as soon as he finished his address and collected his check. (Gunther Schuller did the same thing on another occasion, except he wasn't rude or arrogant.) Zappa's point was that SCI composers had it easy in the Ivory Tower, couldn't cut it in the real world (as he had done), and weren't writing music that anyone wanted to hear except other SCI composers.

Richard Brooks had a different take in an email correspondence on the subject:

I remember laughing hysterically at the time. Obviously, Zappa was being "Zappa" and that means being satirical to the utmost. If he really believed it was a waste of time to compose "serious" music why did he continue to do it himself? Watching him pace around the halls when his stuff was being performed made it VERY clear he was concerned about what "we" thought about it. If he didn't why would he act so?

The thing about satire, of course, is there is always a kernel of truth behind it. That's what makes it work--take a bit of reality and stretch it almost to the breaking point in ridicule. Zappa was a master of this and

knew it! BTW, the week before the conference he was on the Johnny Carson show and mentioned ASUC. I believe that is the only time the organization was ever mentioned on network TV!

Michael Harrington was doing his doctorate at OSU and assigned to ferry Zappa around. When it was time to leave he knew I and another composer had flights around the same time. We got to ride with Zappa to the airport. He had an hour or so before his flight so we all sat and had coffee and talked. Except for his quite outré attire he was, under these conditions, just a "regular" guy. Talked about his family, the music business, etc. No bravado, no crap, just "ordinary" conversation.

Zappa was a unique talent and, probably, a troubled soul (there's certainly a lot of bitterness behind the satire!). I'm glad I got to meet him "behind the scenes" and not just the public persona.

I remember it as one of our best conferences. Zappa certainly attracted a lot of attention and I'm sure some people were there because of him. One thing I do remember clearly is him pacing outside the hall whenever one of his own works was being performed. He wouldn't go inside to hear it but listened from outside the doors.

It remains clear that the Zappa address, and his presence at the conference, left a variety of impressions.

Conclusion

I believe there is a lot of truth to the suggestion from Richard Brooks that Zappa was a "troubled soul" and that much of his externally projected persona was a compensation for a variety of insecurities. At the same time, it took a great deal of individuality and courage to be so unfailingly consistent as a challenger of any established system that he identified.

Zappa saw tremendous value in rhetoric, and through his actions demonstrated that he truly believed that truth was a hard-earned prize. I consider his apparent obnoxiousness to be a mere character that he appropriated because it provided a vehicle for his most biting arguments. It is also very entertaining.

I agree with Zappa that the culture of composition in academe has generally become too polite and conservative, and that the profession would benefit from culture change in which criticisms and disagreements could be addressed more openly and with greater freedom. Career concerns lead to cautiousness: the fear always exists that person whose work you could challenge one day could be sitting on a hiring committee the next. It is safer to nod and smile at a concert performance than to explore substantive, but possibly offensive, discussion. I cannot see where such avoidance is healthy, and neither could Zappa.

APPENDIX

Following is the entire content of the address by Zappa, as presented at the following website:
<http://otg.brainiac.com/fzfull.htm>

BINGO! THERE GOES YOUR TENURE!

I am occasionally asked to attend forums and symposia on musical matters. I am usually 'booked in as a novelty act', or 'token eccentric' to liven things up for 'the serious people'.

This event is no exception. I do not belong to your organization. I know nothing about it. I am not even interested in it, and yet, a request has been made for me to give what purports to be 'THE KEYNOTE SPEECH'.

Before I go on, let me warn you that I talk dirty, and that I will say things you will neither enjoy or agree with. I am sure you won't feel threatened, since I am a mere buffoon, and you are all SERIOUS AMERICAN COMPOSERS.

For those of you who don't know, I am also a composer. I write old-fashioned music which does not require an explanation. I taught myself how to do it by going to the library and listening to records. I started when I was fourteen. I have been doing it now for thirty years. I don't like schools. I don't like teachers. I don't like most of the things you believe in.

As if that weren't bad enough, I play the electric guitar. I have made rock & roll albums for the last twenty years. Thirty five of them. I own all the rights to my master tapes and publish my own music. I earn my living from making music. I am an anachronism in dinosaur's clothing.

I am not 'one of you', and, fortunately, for the safety of our planet, you are not 'one of me'. For convenience, without wishing to offend your membership, I will use the word 'WE' when discussing matters pertaining to composers. Some of the 'WE' references will apply generally; others will not. You can sort them out for yourselves. Now, the speech:

IS NEW MUSIC RELEVANT IN AN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY?

The most baffling aspect of the 'Industrial American Relevance Question', is why do people continue to compose music (and even pretend to teach others how to do it) when they already know the answer: nobody gives a fuck.

Is it really worth the trouble to write a new piece of music for an audience that doesn't care?

There must be at least a half dozen people in this room who are totally convinced that writing music is a wonderful thing to do, but, if Democracy is the system under which we attempt to exist, then the desires of the majority must receive some consideration. The general consensus seems to be that music by living composers is not only irrelevant, but genuinely obnoxious to a society which concerns itself primarily with the consumption of disposable goods.

Surely we must be punished for wasting everyone's time with an art form so 'unrequired' and 'trivial' in the general 'scheme of THINGS'.

Ask your banker...he'll tell you. We are scum. We are the SCUM OF THE EARTH. We are bad people. We are useless bums. No matter how much tenure we manage to weasel out of the universities where we manufacture our baffling, insipid packages of inconsequential poot, we know ~ deep-down ~ that WE ARE WORTHLESS.

Some of us smoke a pipe. Some of us have tweed sport coats with leather patches on the elbows. Some of us have mad-scientist eyebrows. Some of us engage in the shameless display of long, incredibly dramatic mufflers, dangling in the vicinity of a turtle-neck sweater, (with optional beret).

These are only a few of the OTHER REASONS why we must be punished for this blasphemous 'thing' we do. My God! How have we managed to get away with it this long! Why, if it weren't for the foundation grants handed out by ignorant committees for tax purposes, we would have been EXPOSED long ago!

Lucky for us those 'little corporate presents' exist. They make it possible for us to whiff the aroma of simulated 'prestige', as we epoxy our bloated concepts of self-worth into a fixed position.

With our attitudes firmly in place, we play the games of incest, sabotage and 'buddy-bonus' every year at Pulitzer time. We have been doing it forever. We are AMERICANS. We do it better than everyone else. No one will catch us. We are THE TRUE SPIRIT OF AMERICAN MUSIC: tiny, mean, vindictive, empty, dishonest. So what? We have tenure.

We will teach the future composers to be just like us. The guys over in the Law School are doing the same thing, so it must be okay.

We will pretend not to notice that our present crop of lawyers (who will eventually become judges, politicians, presidents and other types of white collar criminals) were churned out in the image of their professors, producing a generation of parasites which can exist only by complicating everything in daily life to the point where it is impossible to function without their services.

The reason a graduate lawyer makes more money than a graduate composer is that he has been able to trick people into believing that there is a need for him to 'exist'.

There is really no way a composer will ever convince a REAL AMERICAN PERSON that there is a need for his services. The older ones know this, but continue to teach their ancient nonsense anyway. Not because it is a historical necessity, not because they believe in the 'ancient nonsense' as an aesthetic ideal, not because they are 'DRIVEN' . . . simply because it CAN be sort of an OKAY JOB (if you don't mind 'wearing the brown lipstick' after those meetings with the board regents).

We are in the same business as a large number of 'important dead people'; therefore we ought to consider the historical implications of our present situation. Ever heard this one before?

"Back in the old days, when all the REALLY GOOD MUSIC was being written, composers were TRULY INSPIRED, had a DEEP MEANING in their works and SUFFERED INTENSE EMOTIONAL DISCOMFORT as these GREAT WORKS were 'BORN'."

Yes, people still believe in this kind of stuff. In truth, the situation was pretty much the same as now, (with a few slight variations).

THEN: The composer had to write for the specific tastes (no matter how bad) of, THE KING, THE POLITICAL DICTATOR, or THE CHURCH. Failure to do so resulted in unemployment, torture or death. The public was not consulted. They simply were not equipped to make assessments of relative merit from gavotte to gavotte. If the KING couldn't gavotte to it, then it had no right to exist.

ALL OF THE SWILL PRODUCED UNDER THESE CONSTRAINTS IS WHAT WE NOW ADMIRE AS 'REAL CLASSICAL MUSIC'. Forget what it sounds like . . . forget whether or not you happen to enjoy it . . . that's how it got made . . . and when music is taught in schools, it is the 'taste norms' of those KINGS, DICTATORS, and CLERICS which are perpetuated in the harmony and counterpoint classes.

After those are doled out, and the student gets to the 'advanced stuff', he is introduced to the splendors of 12-tone rigmorale, serialized dynamics, and computer programming of 'automated indeterminate composition'.

Those 'tools' enable the budding genius to do what everybody else does in 'modern life': hide behind preposterous regulations (preferably as a member of a 'committee'), in order to absolve himself of blame or responsibility for 'individual action' ~ in this case, the heinous act of 'musical creation'. By conforming to these idiocies, the young composer receives praise, certification of splendidness, and GRANT MONEY. Everything his teachers would murder for.

Anyone not choosing to follow this approved method of enlightenment is regarded as a fool or a pervert.

Today, the composer has to write for the specific tastes (no matter how bad) of 'THE KING' (now disguised as a Movie or TV producer, The Head of the Opera Company, The Lady With The Frightening Hair on the Special Committee, or her niece, DEBBIE).

Some of you don't know about DEBBIE since you don't have to deal with radio stations or record companies in the way that people from the 'other world' do, but you ought to find out about her, just in case you decide to 'switch over' later.

DEBBIE is thirteen years old. Her parents like to think of themselves as 'average, God-fearing American White People'. Her dad belongs to a corrupt Union of some sort and is, as we might suspect, a lazy incompetent, over-paid, ignorant sonofabitch. Her mom is a

sexually maladjusted mercenary shrew who lives only to spend her husband's paycheck on ridiculous clothes designed to make her look 'younger'.

DEBBIE is incredibly stupid. She has been raised to respect the values and attitudes which her parents hold sacred. Sometimes she dreams about being kissed by a lifeguard.

When the people in THE SECRET OFFICE WHERE THEY RUN EVERYTHING FROM found out about DEBBIE, they were thrilled. She was perfect. She was hopeless. She was THEIR KIND OF GIRL. She was immediately chosen for the critical role of 'ARCH-TYPICAL IMAGINARY POP MUSIC CONSUMER AND ULTIMATE ARBITER OF MUSICAL TASTE FOR THE ENTIRE NATION'. From that moment on, everything musical in this country would have to be modified to conform to what they computed to be HER NEEDS & DESIRES.

DEBBIE'S 'taste' determined the size, shape and color of all musical information in the United States during the latter part of the twentieth century. Eventually she grew up to be just like her mother and married a guy just like her father. She has somehow managed to reproduce herself. The people in THE SECRET OFFICE have their eye on her daughter at this very moment.

As a SERIOUS AMERICAN COMPOSER, should DEBBIE really concern you? Because DEBBIE prefers only short songs with lyrics about boy-girl situations sung by persons of indeterminate sex, wearing S & M clothing, and because there is LARGE MONEY INVOLVED, the major record companies, which, a few years ago, occasionally risked investment in recording of new works, have all but shut down their 'classical divisions' and seldom record 'new music'. The small labels that do release it have wretched distribution. Some have wretched accounting procedures. They might release your recording, but you won't get paid.

The problem with living composers is: THEY HAVE TO EAT. Mostly what they eat is brown and lumpy. There is no question that this diet has had an effect on their work.

Just as composers in the earlier age had to accommodate the whims of KINGS, DICTATORS, and CHURCHES, composers today must write for the amusement and edification of their sinister descendants: The Guy who Figures Out What Kind of Tax Break you get from ARTS DONATIONS, The OIL, TOBACCO, or CHEMICAL COMPANY That Needs To 'Lose' a Few Million Bucks By The End of The Fiscal Year, The Five guys Who Program All the Radio Stations in The U.S., The Fanatic Fundamentalists Who Demand Bland Lyric Content and Total avoidance of Biological Reality, and The M.B.A.s Who Advise Everyone On How TO Make More Money By Praising Ignorance and Docility While Suppressing Anything Intelligent or Inventive.

This perennial condition is a natural outgrowth of, and a just reward for, our strict adherence to the rules and regulations adopted by the aforementioned 'famous dead people'.

As long as composers continue to 'bend over' for the new KINGS, DICTATORS, CHURCHES (and MUSICIANS), this condition will persist, eventually resulting in the destruction of what I regard as the most 'physically inspiring' of all the arts.

PHYSICALLY INSPIRING? Will the dancers and painters and sculptors all twitch around in disagreement? The pay is lousy, guys 'n gals, so don't be jealous because we get to have 'intimate dealings' with nature's most inexorable force. We are talking about TIME here, folks. A composer's job essentially involves the decoration of fragments of TIME.

Without TIME, nothing can 'happen'. Without music to decorate it, TIME is just a bunch of boring production deadlines, or a collection of dates by which bills must be paid.

In spite of the fact that we work with a mysterious substance, not yet approved by the FDA, in an unsafe industrial environment, we are barely recognized by the union which pretends to look after the interests of the savage unfortunates who must play the things we write. In 'union terms' we exist only to provide work for the 'copyists'.

Why are we treated this way by the Musician's Union? Well . . . we aren't 'musicians' . . . we are merely 'composers'. All the good composers are dead (ask any string player). If we are not DEAD we are not GOOD. If we ARE dead we do not require LABOR REPRESENTATION. If we are alive we are of NO CONSEQUENCE to a string player.

String players and their special needs and preferences play an important role in determining union policy. If they had their way, stringed instruments would be used only for the performance of music by DEAD PEOPLE. If I had my way, the instruments themselves would be played by dead people, and only dead people would be allowed to listen to the results.

Musicians may claim that this is unfair, since they make less money than their counterparts in the stage-hands union.

Did you know that the entire crew of stage-hands at Carnegie Hall (who might do nothing more than set up four chairs for a string quartet) is guaranteed a ridiculous weekly salary (plus ridiculous bonuses if a recording or filming is taking place), and are entitled to residual payments from the video-tape or film of that performance if it is sold to European TV, for each showing, in each country?

Composers are entitled to some royalty payment for the use of their music. Dead guys don't collect -- THE REAL REASON their music is chosen for performance. Sometimes, by accident, the work of a living composer creeps in. Have you ever tried to collect one of those 'royalty' payments?

There is another reason for the popularity of 'dead person music'. Conductors prefer it. Why? Because they need, more than anything else, to LOOK GOOD. By performing pieces that the orchestra members have hacked their way through since conservatory, the rehearsal requirements are minimized, the players go into 'juke-box mode' and spool it off with ease, and the conductor, unencumbered by a score with 'problems' in it, gets to thrash around in mock-ecstasy for the benefit of the committee ladies who wish he didn't have any pants on.

Occasionally, people discuss the 'aesthetic gulf' between the world of 'popular music' and the world of 'serious music'. Invariably arguments are put forth to show how wretched

'popular music' is, and how wonderful 'serious music' is. Nobody ever argues the other side of the issue because people who like 'popular music' don't even know anything else exists, and, furthermore, if they did, wouldn't give a shit about it.

The problem with this sort of discussion is that it presupposes one set of boring norms to be somehow more enthralling than another set of boring norms.

In order for a piece of music to be considered 'classical', it must be constructed according to specific 'architectural guidelines' . . . so many bars of this, so many bars of that, modulate to the relative minor here, resolve over there. All-important factors, discussable in absolute terms during intermission with a plastic cup of cheap white wine in your hand.

In order for the lowliest piece of musical trash to get played on the radio, it too must adhere to an iron-clad set of structural and stylistic regulations, in their way EVEN MORE RIGOROUS AND CONFINING THAN THE ONES CELEBRATED IN YOUR UNIVERSITIES ON A DAILY BASIS . . . and they have to tell their miserable little stories in three minutes or less. Sad and fake as they are, the GRAMMY AWARDS seem as perfectly suited to be the celebration of this sort of 'craftsmanship' as the sad, fake Fromms and Pulitzers craved by many of the denizens of this convention.

Hey! Buddy! When was the last time you THWARTED A NORM? Can't risk it, eh? Too much at stake over at the old Alma Mater? Unqualified for 'janitorial deployment'? Look out! Here they come again! It's that same old bunch of guys that live in the old joke. It's you, and two billion of your closest friends, standing in shit up to your chins, chanting, "Don't make a wave!", living in terror of a 'bad review' from one of those tone-deaf egomaniac elitists who use the premiere performance of every new work as an excuse to sharpen their 'word-skills', settling for rotten performances by musicians and conductors who prefer the sound of death warmed-over to ANYTHING scribbled in recent memory (making them assistant music critics, but somehow more glamorous), 'fudging' on their serial pedigrees, secure in the knowledge that 'no one checks anymore'.

Beat them to the punch, ladies and gentlemen! The Day of Atonement draws near! Punish YOURSELVES before THEY do it for you! If you do it AS A GROUP, the TV rights might be worth something.

Start planning now, so everything will be ready in time for the next convention. OF COURSE YOU CAN DO IT! Change the name of your organization from 'A.S.U.C.' to 'WE SUCK', steal some cyanide from the chemistry department, put it in the punch bowl at the reception with some of that 'white wine' artistic people really go for, and BITE THE BIG ONE.

If the current level of ignorance and illiteracy persists, within two or three hundred years a merchandising nostalgia for THIS ERA will occur, and guess what music they'll be playing! They'll still play it wrong, of course, and you won't get any money for having written it, but, what the hey? At least you didn't die of syphilis in a whore-house opium stupor with a white curly wig on.

At one point, some of you may recall, the government considered closing the U.S. patent office because they were convinced that everything 'new' had already been invented. Almost by accident, this closure was postponed.

The 'modern composer's patent office' has been closed for quite some time now, and will never open again. It's all over, folks. Get smart and take out a real estate license.

The least you can do is tell your students: "DON'T DO IT! STOP THIS MADNESS! DON'T WRITE MUSIC!" If you don't . . . the little sonofabitch might grow up with the ability to kiss more ass than you, have a longer, more dramatic neck-scarf, write music more baffling and insipid than your own, and BINGO! There goes your tenure.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Kostelanetz, Richard. 1997. *The Frank Zappa Companion*. New York: Schirmer Books.

Zappa, Frank, and Peter Occhiogrosso. 1989. *The Real Frank Zappa Book*. New York: Poseidon Press.

<http://www.afka.net/articles/index.htm>

<http://otg.brainiac.com/fzfull.htm>

Various email correspondences, as cited