

Elmore

SAVING AMERICAN MUSIC

Rock rolls into jazz

Radiohead, Steely Dan, Zappa Plays Zappa
concoct their bitches brews

Maria Muldaur says Yes!
One broadminded babe

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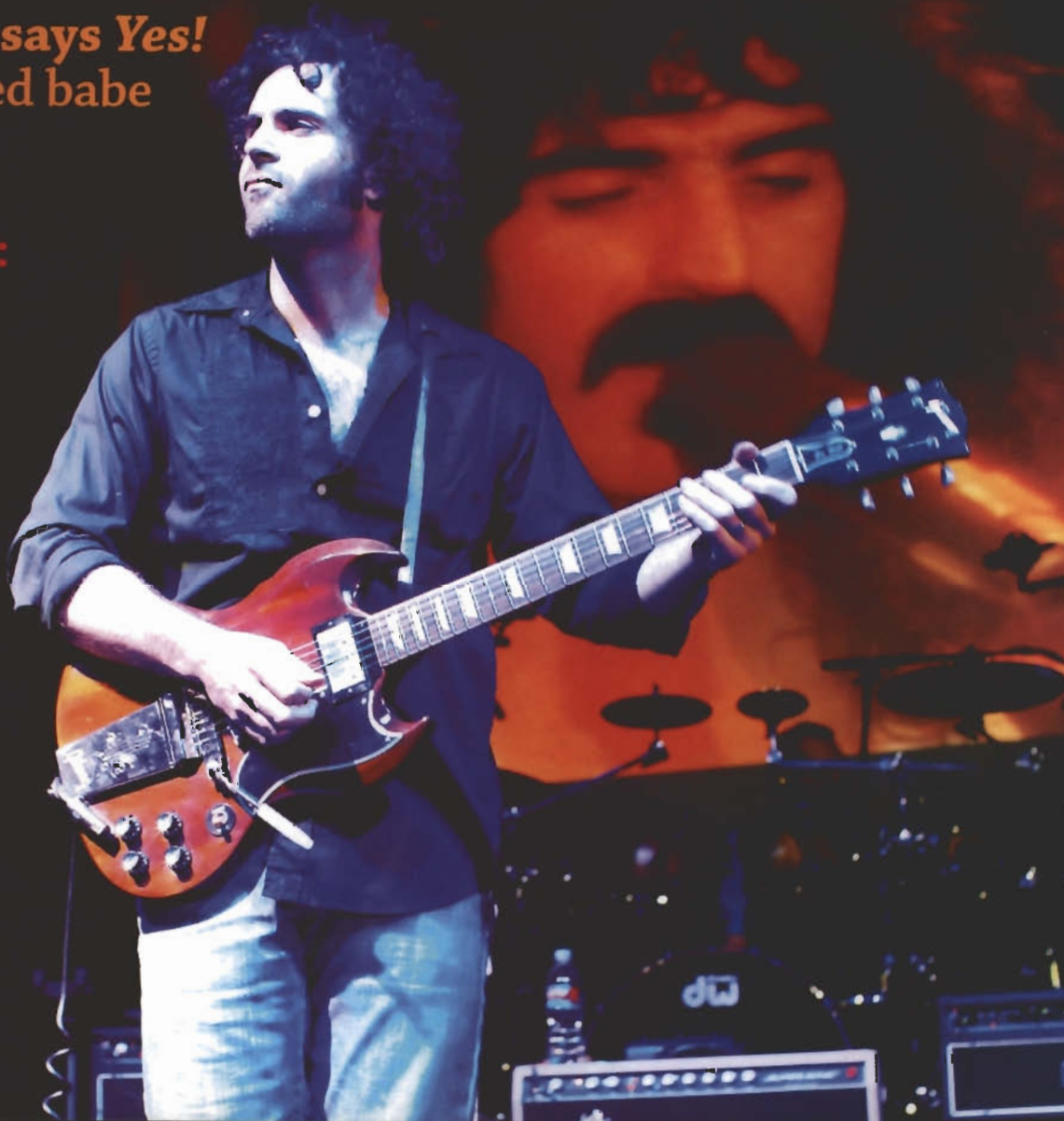
*Odetta and
Tab Benoit
sing out*

Plus:

Steve Winwood
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Herbie Hancock
Al Green
Los Lonely Boys
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"Jazz is not dead, it just smells funny." —Frank Zappa (1974)



DWEEZIL ZAPPA ON FRANK'S JAZZ

Certain individuals live and breathe jazz, think it's a religion, follow it by the book and don't do anything new with it—they do their best to sound exactly like the people that came before. You have all these people that only want to sound like Wes Montgomery, and it's cool to have that as one thing you know how to do, but that's all they do. Frank never had any thought process that resembled that. One of his quotes was saying, "Jazz is comedy," and I think what he meant by that is that some

people take it so seriously that it becomes comical... Frank really made fun of people who did that...especially the real super, out-of-control be-bop heads and the smooth jazz kind of thing.

I wouldn't put "Peaches En Regalia," in a jazz category necessarily, but it's an iconic Frank Zappa type of composition that draws from multiple styles and blends them together. Frank was a young kid that went to the library and taught himself to be a composer from reading books. He operated out of this notion of "Anything, anytime, and for any reason at all." You can hear that in his music, blending textures and styles in a way that other people wouldn't think to do because they either think it's wrong, or they just haven't even been exposed to those elements at all.

Take George Duke for example—obviously George had all these great technical abilities but then Frank asked him to play this complete dumbed-down doo-wop thing and George was really not into playing it. Frank said, "What's the matter? Is it beneath you?" He was just joking with him, but then George started to let go of the overall concept of "to be a serious musician, you always have to play

serious, heavy stuff." He ended up having a lot more fun; he ended up playing all these synthesizers that he never would have, if Frank didn't put it right under his nose.

Take a song like "Brown Shoes Don't Make It" which has all these insane orchestral elements superimposed over a goofy, different '60s style Motown thing—that piece in particular is one of my favorites because it has so many crazy elements. It's 40 years old and just for what it sounds like—not just what it's saying but the sound of it and the musical elements—it still sounds shocking to this day.

Having learned a lot of these songs and changing a lot about what I do on guitar, it's now much more inspirational to me later in my life than it was earlier, so I can expect that there will be even more influence in the coming years. The combination of how to arrange, for those elements to co-exist, even in the same song, that's what Frank was great at and that's what we have a lot of fun doing on stage. The whole guitar technique, what I'm able to do now, I can get to notes that I couldn't have even thought about before, so it definitely has changed and will continue to change my playing.